WHITAKER'S DUKEDOM

EDGAR JEPSON

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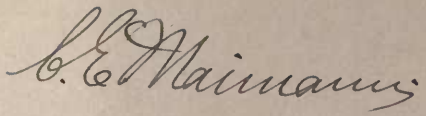

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By

EDGAR JEPSON

Author of

POLLYOOLY, THE TERRIBLE TWINS
THE INTERVENING LADY, ETC.

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CHAPTER I

THE dust lay very thick on the glaring white road; the hedges were gray with it; and the trees of the wood were gray with it for fifteen feet above the hedges. It had been thrown to that height by the hasty motorist, for the road from Lanchester to Bartle's End is a short cut much affected by him on his way to the North or the South. Also, running as it does through the Quentin Abbey estate of the Duke of Lanchester, and affording many views of that noble eighteenth-century building, the Abbey itself, it is one of the most beautiful roads in the Midlands.

The motorist in his haste loses much of this beauty; but James Whitaker, though he was now walking slowly enough, was losing it all. He trudged along wearily, his eyes fixed for the most part on the dust a few feet ahead of him, giving the least possible heed to the beauties of the country through which he was passing; his dusty ears deaf to the song of the birds in the wood; his nostrils dulled by the dust which clogged them to the fragrance of the flowers which hung on the heavy air.

He had walked nearly thirty miles along dusty roads since breakfast; and his feet were sore in his

boots, of the shape and quality supplied by the stern contractor to the British private soldier, and known as army bluchers. James Whitaker had bought them out of a job lot, at a boot shop in the Vauxhall Road, for a dollar and a quarter. He had been pleased with his purchase, for he was sure that they would last him for years. But he had not expected them to be comfortable; and they had never belied his expectation. He was not only weary but dejected; and much of his weariness sprang from that dejection. The day before he had come down by train into the country to seek help. His small business of dealer in second-hand furniture and curiosities, in Watergate Street, Hammersmith, was starving for want of capital; and he had come down to try to borrow five hundred dollars from his uncle, Robert Unwin, a well-to-do farmer at Bowdeswell.

He had failed in the attempt. His well-to-do uncle, a bachelor, could well have lent him the five hundred dollars; and since James Whitaker's father, in his earlier, affluent days, had lent Robert Unwin the money to stock the farm out of which he had so prospered, James felt that he had a genuine claim on him. Moreover, he had been able to offer him security in the form of a fifteen-hundred-dollar life insurance policy on which two hundred and fifty dollars had been already paid. But Robert Unwin had always been a close-fisted man; and years had abated neither his avarice nor his caution. There had been a stern contest of wills, for James Whitaker was not the man to be easily turned aside from his purpose; but in the end

he had failed to bend his uncle's stubborn resolve not to risk his money.

Not only was the failure to borrow the five hundred dollars rankling in James Whitaker's heart, but also the grudging and niggardly hospitality he had received from his uncle. Robert Unwin had welcomed him with a glum coldness and given him cold bacon and bread and dripping and tea for supper, and cold bacon and bread and dripping and tea for breakfast. It made no difference to James that this was his thrifty uncle's perpetual fare. There were many eatable lambs in his uncle's fields, many eatable and certainly egg-laying chickens in his farmyard, many pans of cream in his dairy; and James Whitaker felt that this was indeed shabby treatment to accord to one's only kinsman, the son, too, of one's only benefactor. But he had received the refusal to lend the five hundred dollars and the niggardly hospitality with no display of the anger he felt, for, after all, he was his uncle's natural heir; and he did not wish to endanger his possible, even probable, inheritance.

Now, late in the afternoon, that cold bacon and that dripping rankled in his breast almost more bitterly than his failure to borrow the five hundred dollars. He trudged along at loggerheads with fortune.

He looked, too, at loggerheads with fortune: his cheap, ill-fitting frock coat of the small tradesman, so incongruous with the wood through which he trudged, sagged away from his well-built figure in a distressing and dispirited fashion; and the soft felt hat, which marked the artistic tradesman, looked shab-

bier than ever under its layer of dust. His lips were set grimly, and his square chin was thrust doggedly forward as his shoulders drooped in his weariness. His dark gray eyes, sunk under his jutting brows, were sullen and gloomy, and when now and again he raised them from the dust through which his feet were dragging, he scowled at the livid thunder-cloud which was moving slowly forward above the wood to meet him.

He was walking the thirty-seven miles from Bowdeswell to Lanchester to save seventy-five cents of his railway fare back to London. He would not wear away above five cents' worth of the soles of his army bluchers on that walk; but if he were to get a drenching, he could not estimate the damage to his clothes at much less than fifty cents; and it was a bitter thought that he should be walking thirty-seven miles to save twenty cents.

Then, as he raised his eyes to scowl once more at the thunder-cloud, a heavy rain-drop, precursor of the storm, splashed on his cheek.

"Damn!" he cried, and halted.

He stood for a moment considering what to do, then ran for a gate in the hedge twenty yards down the road, scrambled heavily over it, and hurried up the broad aisle of the wood in a vague hope of finding shelter in some keeper's hut. Failing that, he must find a tree with thick enough branches to save him from the worst of the coming downpour.

He had gone some fifty yards up the aisle when a shout behind him made him turn sharply; and he saw a man climbing over the gate into the wood. He stood

still, hesitating; and the man shouted again. It sounded like "Come out of it!" Then a sudden, poor man's panic seized James Whitaker. He had the townsman's ignorance of the law of trespass; he saw himself involved in trouble with the police, embarrassed by a fine and costs. He saw the man begin to run; he turned and ran himself. As he ran, he was vaguely conscious that the figure of his pursuer was familiar to him. The man shouted again: "Come back, you!" The voice sounded nearer; and he looked over his shoulder to see that the man was indeed nearer. At the sight he lost his head utterly, and rushed on as fast as he could pelt. He had gone some two hundred yards when he found his weariness and his army bluchers already telling on him; he was flagging. Then he saw a narrow path on the left, leading into the heart of the wood. In the hope of finding a hiding-place, he bolted down it, or rather up it, for ten yards from the edge of the aisle it began to rise. He had gone up it but a hundred and fifty yards when he found himself nearly done, panting heavily, his feet grown leaden. He was in no condition to race uphill, in heavy boots, in that stifling heat. Behind him he could hear the footfall of his gaining pursuer, growing louder. It was quicker and lighter than his own: the man was not wearing army bluchers; and he had not walked thirty miles.

James Whitaker ran stubbornly on for seventy more yards; then, gasping heavily, he came stumbling out of the end of the path on to a little plateau on the top of the hill he had mounted. It was grass-grown and

some fifty yards across; and in the middle of it, with spreading boughs that stretched across it from side to side, stood a great oak. He plunged on a few yards, realized that he was nearly at the end of his breath, turned and fell into the boxer's posture of defense, resolved, like the cornered rat he was, to make a fight for it.

His pursuer ran out from the trees, pulled up short five yards away, and stood before him—another panting, glaring James Whitaker!

They stood facing each other, wide-eyed, open-mouthed in glaring astonishment, their arms fallen to their sides, their heads jutted forward, overwhelmed in wonder at their amazing resemblance.

Then the pursuer gasped: "Doubles! Well! I'm . . . What? . . . Who? . . . What the devil?"

Then there was nothing—nothing for either of them; no turf, no wood, no earth, no sky. They did not hear the sharp rattling crash of thunder above their heads; they did not see the flash which struck them.

The next thing that James Whitaker knew was that he had a splitting headache. Then he knew that he was chilled and cold. It was painful to open his eyes; and they blinked round at a world he did not recognize. Then he looked up and saw the great branches of the oak spreading above him; and at the sight of them came back very clearly the sight of his double standing facing him with glaring eyes. He sat up and gazed round him. Yes, it was no dream;

his double lay on the spot where he had been standing, stretched at full length on his face.

James Whitaker stared at him stupidly; then it grew clear to him that they must have been lying there some time, for he was drenched to the skin, and the thunder-cloud had passed over the little hill, though the rain from its backmost edge was still falling on it. He puzzled dully over what could have happened to them; then of a sudden it flashed on him that they had been struck by lightning.

The knowledge startled him and cleared his wits. He scrambled quickly, but stiffly, to his feet, and stared round him wildly. The light of the westerly sun was throwing a bright rainbow on the black thunder-cloud moving away over the woods. He rubbed his cold wet hand over his cold wet forehead and eyes in a somewhat dazed fashion. He shivered with the cold of his drenching.

Then he went slowly to his double, bent down and turned him over gently on to his back. He started up in horror. The flash which had knocked him senseless had burned and seared and twisted his double's face. It was no longer the face of another James Whitaker; indeed, it was no longer a human face. It recalled to him one of the hideous Japanese masks he had sometimes handled in his business.

He stepped back, shuddering. Then he realized that the unfortunate man had felt no pain; that he had no more known what had befallen him than he had known himself; that, in this world, he never would know.

None the less, he could not bear the sight of that distorted face; and he turned the dead man over again so that it was hidden. Then he walked aimlessly to the entrance of the path up which they had come and stared aimlessly down it. He shivered again. Stiffly he took off his coat and shook it; then he put it on again. He kept his back turned to his dead double. He stood hesitating what to do. He thought that he ought to go to find a keeper or some one, and tell him what had happened. It would be tiresome: there would be an inquest, and he would probably have to give evidence. It would mean loss of time and expense. Still it had to be done.

He came back to fetch his hat, which lay under the tree on the other side of the dead man. He made a circuit which kept him three yards away from the body. He picked up the sopping hat, and shook it, and beat it against his thigh. He put it on and stood still, gazing at the dead man.

A curiosity was invading him to know who his double had been: from his clothes he was a gentleman. Well, he would know soon enough. It was clear that he belonged to the neighborhood, or he would not have chased a trespasser. Perhaps he was the owner of the wood. The keeper, if he found one, would be sure to recognize him.

He took two or three steps, past the dead man, toward the path; then he paused and looked at the body again. His curiosity had suddenly grown keen and intense; he wanted to know now—at once—who was this man who had been so like him.

He cast a searching, suspicious glance round the little plateau and over the wood, as if he felt it not quite right that he should gratify his curiosity. Then he came back gingerly to the body and bent down over it. He did not turn it right over, for he could not endure to see again the dreadful face. He raised it, keeping its back toward him, on its left side a few inches, and slipped his hand into the breast pocket of the coat. He found in it a silver cigarette-case and two letters in their envelopes. He gasped when he saw that they were addressed to the Duke of Lanchester. Then he saw that a coronet was engraved on the cigarette-case, a coronet decorated with strawberry-leaves. The dead man must be the Duke of Lanchester himself.

James Whitaker took the letters out of their envelopes. One began "My dear Duke," and was signed "Anne." The other began "My dear Lanchester," and was signed "Herbert." The letter signed "Anne" was certainly not the kind of a letter one would leave in the hand of one's secretary: it was a love-letter. The dead man must be the duke.

James Whitaker stood staring down at him. . . . So his double had been a duke. . . . He frowned at the dead man's back at the thought of the soft and easy life the duke had led, while he himself had been struggling all the years so hard and so painfully. Some people were born lucky. . . . He stared at the dead man's back enviously: that was his own ear, though not so red . . . and that was the very way his own hair grew in the back of his neck. . . .

Why, there was no difference at all between them. . . . "Yes: some people did have all the luck. . . . They were born with it."

His face cleared a little as the thought came to him that, after all, the duke was dead, and his luck at an end.

"Better a living furniture dealer than a dead duke," he muttered, with a touch of staginess quite foreign to his simple nature, the result, perhaps, of shock from the lightning-stroke.

Again he passed his hand over his aching forehead and eyes. The ache prevented him from thinking clearly. Then, mechanically, he opened the cigarette-case, took out a gold-tipped cigarette, and after a little difficulty with his damp matches, lighted it. It was such a cigarette as he had never smoked; he had not known that there was such tobacco. Without thinking, he put the cigarette-case in his pocket. He grabbed it out again: that would never do! He must not rob a dead man! He stooped down and put the cigarette-case and the letters back into the breast pocket of the duke's coat. Then he reflected that, after all, it could matter nothing to the dead duke; but he left the cigarette-case in his pocket.

The cigarette seemed to be soothing his aching head a little. But a heavy lassitude was stealing over him. He did not start off to find a keeper. He looked wearily round the plateau; then he looked again at the dead man. The still inert body held his eye. He wondered idly what it was like to be a duke: it must be a wonderful feeling to be always easy in one's mind about

money. . . . And then to be able to go where you liked. . . . To the Continent. . . . And do what you liked without ever thinking of the expense. . . . Yes, it must be wonderful.

Well, that was all over for the duke.

How unfair it all was; that one man should have everything, and so many hundreds nothing. . . . He would have made quite as good a duke as the dead man; he was sure of it . . . and he would never have thrown away that splendid luck by getting struck by that lightning. . . . He would never have gone out of his way to chase a trespasser through the wood. . . . What harm could any one do in a wood? . . . No, he was not the kind of man to bother about such a thing. . . . He was not the man to pay a keeper to do his work, and then do it for him. . . . Evidently the duke had not been like him in mind . . . but how astonishingly like him he was, or had been, in body!

He started back a pace; then he began to tremble. A thought, a great thought had suddenly flashed into his mind: why should he not turn this likeness to account? The thought set his mind whirling.

Presently it grew steady again. Yes, why shouldn't he make use of the likeness? . . . Just to see for himself what it was like to be a duke. . . . Just to see what it felt like. . . . Just for once to have two or three splendid days free from all worry about money. . . . It wouldn't do anybody any harm. . . . He would just have a splendid time for two or three days and then disappear. . . .

The duke's body wouldn't be found for two or three days. . . . Besides, it wouldn't matter if it was, since no one would ever recognize that dreadful face.

He certainly could do it. . . . It was just a matter of putting on the duke's clothes. . . . The likeness would do the rest.

He hesitated, looking down on the dead man with troubled eyes in a doubtful face, gnawing his thumb. It would be horrible stripping him. . . . It would be bad enough to strip any dead man. . . . But to strip a dead man with that face would be horribly unpleasant.

He took a dozen jerky steps up and down the glade, shaken by the conflict between desire and repulsion. His head ached and throbbed worse than ever. The thought, the driving thought, of being free from the money worry for a time was beating repulsion down. Besides, in the back of his mind (he would not allow it to grow quite clear) was the thought that it might mean freedom from the money worry for good. If he were the duke for only three days, it might lead to other things. . . . It *would* lead to other things.

He made up his mind to do it.

If James Whitaker was slow in thought, he was quick in action. The open turf under the great oak was no place to make the change of clothes. There were three paths leading from it into the wood; and at any minute a keeper might come along any one of them. He picked up the body of the duke and carried it into the thick bushes on the left-hand side of the hill. A dozen yards in he laid it gently down on its

back; then he took out his handkerchief and covered the dreadful face.

He got to work quickly. The death-stiffness had not yet set in; and the body and limbs were limp and easy to handle. The coat came off easily. He hesitated a moment, holding it; then he took off his own coat, spread it flat between two bushes, and laid the duke's garments on it as he took them off. Presently he was breathing quickly, almost panting; and he kept casting furtive glances into the thick bushes round him. He was even sweating a little. The waistcoat and trousers also came off easily; he had more trouble with the shirt and the underclothing. The handkerchief kept slipping from the face, and presently he tied it over it. The sun was now shining bright and warm, and the birds were singing louder than ever. James Whitaker did not hear them: he was too busy. The duke was wearing low shoes, and they came off easily.

At last the body was stripped, its garments in a pile on his coat. James Whitaker paused and gazed at it curiously. It was so like his own. He could see no marks on it by which it might be distinguished from his own—no moles or scars; only the duke's feet were very white, and there were no corns on them. His own feet were much redder, from wearing army bluchers; and there were corns on them. He must keep them out of sight. It should not be difficult, though of course, as a duke, he would have a valet. His hands would pass muster; he had always kept his hands and nails well, thanks to Millicent, his wife. Well, she was being justified of her insistence on it now.

He rose, emptied his pockets, stripped quickly and began to put on his double's clothes. The shirt and underclothing were dry, for the cloth of the suit was rain-proof; plainly the duke had been expecting the storm. The silk waistcoat and pants felt very soft and luxurious to James Whitaker's skin. The shoes fitted him admirably. He shivered as he put on the cold sodden collar. In putting on the coat he pulled the left lapel, and a couple of inches of it crumpled in his hand. The lightning had scorched it. Last of all he drew the duke's ring, a signet-ring, off his finger and put it on his own. As he did it, it seemed to him that he assumed definitely the personality of the duke.

Then he fell to work to dress the duke in his own clothes. It was more difficult than stripping him; but there were not so many garments: James Whitaker did not wear underclothing in the summer. The most difficult part of it was getting the army bluchers on to the limp feet. But James Whitaker was working easily and coolly now; he no longer breathed quickly and sweated. At last he tied the lace of the second boot and rose with a deep sigh of relief.

He had no fear of the body being identified as that of James Whitaker. He had bought a new shirt for his visit to his uncle, and it had not yet been marked: there were no under-garments; and his collar, being celluloid, was unmarked. He put back the Ingersoll watch and cheap silver chain into the waistcoat, the four dollars and seventy-five cents, in silver, and the damp match-box into the trousers pockets, the cheap pipe and tobacco-pouch and the handkerchief into the

pockets of the frock coat. His fountain pen, a gift from his wife, he kept. He did not take the trouble to cut the maker's name from the lining of the soft hat. Such hats must be sold in tens of thousands; and it seemed wiser to leave it.

He picked up the duke's body, carried it out of the bushes and laid it on its face on the spot where it had fallen from the stroke. He picked up the duke's Panama hat. The front of it was scorched, and in the brim, where the lightning had pierced it, was a neat round hole with blackened edges, about three-quarters of an inch across. He put on the hat, and found that it fitted him.

He looked slowly round the glade, then went down the path.

CHAPTER II

HE walked slowly, on unsteady feet, though the duke's boots fitted them not merely as if they had been made for them, but as if they had also been worn to them. His head was still a little dazed from the lightning-stroke; and the business of undressing and dressing the duke had, in his shaken condition, tried him severely. Moreover, it was a further strain on him that he had done it quickly. A hundred yards down the path he stopped and leaned against the dry side of a tree-trunk.

The thought came to him to examine the duke's pockets, and he set about it. The old-fashioned gold watch had stopped, probably it had been stopped by the lightning-stroke; its chain was of platinum and gold. The signet-ring was also old, set with an amethyst engraved with a coat of arms. He took it that they were the Lanchester arms. In the right-hand trousers pocket were twenty dollars and fifteen cents in silver. In the left-hand breast pocket of the coat were the two letters and the cigarette-case; in its right-hand breast pocket was a note-case containing three twenty-five-dollar and two fifty-dollar notes. There was something so comforting in the feel of them that he gazed round him with a sudden air of guilt. In the right-hand waistcoat pocket was a small mother-of-

pearl penknife; and in the pocket above it an amber and gold cigarette-holder.

The sight of it suggested to him that another cigarette would be soothing; he took one from the case and put it in his mouth. Then he felt in his pockets for a match-box and found that the duke had come out without any matches. He was thoroughly annoyed by the oversight. As he put the cigarette back into the case, he wished that he had not left his own matches on the body of the duke.

He walked slowly on into the broad aisle of the wood up which the duke had chased him, cast one look down it toward the road, and then turned up it in the opposite direction. As he had come along the road, he had had glimpses of a great building behind the wood: it must be the duke's castle. At the end of the aisle a path ran, right and left, along the edge of the wood, and along the top of a high bank, covered with brushwood and trees, at the foot of which flowed the sluggish stream of the River Wyper. Through the trees he saw the great building on the right, half a mile away.

He turned up the path to the right, toward it; and as he went he wished that he knew very much more about himself than he did. All he knew was that he was the Duke of Lanchester; he did not know his Christian name, or his family name, or the name of the duchess. He did not know, indeed, whether there were a duchess, but he had a vague idea that the duke was unmarried. He did not know the name of a single relation or dependent. He did not even know

the name of the building to which he was going. However, the lightning-stroke would account for his not knowing people and things; any one who had been struck by lightning might lose their memory for a few weeks; and in the course of a few weeks he would pick up nearly everything needful for him to know.

He stopped stock-still for a moment: what was this he was thinking about a few weeks? He was going to be a duke only for a day or two—just to see what it was like. He went on again, frowning; the stroke had certainly confused his mind.

At the end of a quarter of a mile the path ran down the bank to a foot-bridge across the river. He crossed it and came into the park, in which, a quarter of a mile away, the great building stood. The park was dotted with great trees, single or in clumps; and in sight, browsing or lying down in the bracken, were nearly a hundred deer. The sight pleased him; the thought that he was the owner of a deer-park (for a day or two) was indeed very pleasing.

He walked slowly across the park and came to the tall hedge of the gardens of the Abbey. Passing through a gate in it, twenty yards farther on, he came to the high turfed bank of the outermost terrace and slowly and shakily mounted its steps. On the terrace two gardeners, cutting the grass of the lawn, touched their hats to him; and he saw that they looked at him curiously. It did not surprise him: he thought it likely that a man who had been struck, even gently, by lightning would present a strange appearance. Slowly and shakily he mounted the broad flight of marble

steps to the great doors of the building, and was on the very point of pulling the old-fashioned, wrought-iron bell-handle which hung beside the door, when he bethought himself that he must not ring the bell of his own castle. He opened the door and stepped into a small modern vestibule which had been cut off from the end of the great hall.

A footman, who was sitting on an old oak chair, reading a newspaper, sprang up and stood stiffly at attention. James Whitaker looked at him and was pleased to perceive that he did not look intelligent. At the moment he did not wish to have to do with any one who looked intelligent.

He said in a voice purposely husky: "I've been struck by lightning. Get me a brandy and soda."

"Struck by lightning? Yes, your Grace," said the footman, springing briskly to the inner door of the vestibule and holding it open. His face showed no perturbation or surprise at his master's accident, only interest in opening the door quickly.

James Whitaker passed unsteadily through it into his great ducal hall. The footman hurried quickly past him to bring the brandy and soda.

James Whitaker was but dimly aware of the greatness and beauty of the hall. The grateful object which caught and chained his eye was a large and comfortable easy chair. He went quickly to it, and sank into it with a great sigh of pleasure, stretched out his legs, and in a few seconds was nodding drowsily. He was roused by the sound of hurried footsteps. The footman had come back bearing brandy, soda-water

and a large glass on a silver salver. A big man in evening dress, wearing an air of the liveliest surprise and anxiety, came behind the footman. James Whitaker perceived that it was his butler.

They came to him; and murmuring disjointed words of sympathy, the butler mixed the brandy and soda and handed it to him.

James Whitaker took the glass in a shaky hand and drained it slowly. It was one of the most grateful drinks he had ever drunk in his life. Forthwith it began to strengthen him and clear his head.

He lay back for half a minute with closed eyes, enjoying its grateful warmth; then he opened his eyes and said in a much fainter, much huskier voice than need be: "The lightning—the lightning has—muddled my head. I—don't seem—to know where I am. Just get me up to my bedroom, will you? I had better lie down for an hour."

They helped him to his feet, and leaning on their arms, he went feebly down the hall and up the broad staircase at the end of it. In the corridor at the top of the staircase they led him through the fourth door on the left hand (he was careful to mark the way he went and count the doors) into a big airy bedroom. They were leading him to the bed, but he said that he would rest on the broad couch under one of the windows, and stretched himself at full length on it.

"Hadn't I better send Tomkins to get your Grace to bed?" said the butler anxiously.

James Whitaker took note of the fact that his valet's

name was Tomkins. But he said: "No; I'll rest here."

"But hadn't I better send for Doctor Arbuthnot to see your Grace?" said the butler.

"Yes, send for Doctor Arbuthnot," said James Whitaker, pleased to have learned yet another useful name so soon. "And find me some quinine to be going on with. I was lying insensible in the rain for I don't know how long."

He was careful to speak huskily: he did not wish them to observe that the duke was speaking in a changed voice.

"Yes, your Grace," said the butler; and he hurried out of the room, followed by the footman.

The butler was back in less than three minutes with a bottle of quinine tablets. James Whitaker took two of them, bade the butler bring him a rug, and when he had covered him with it, dismissed him. Then he relaxed his limbs, and with a mind for the time being at ease, fell asleep.

Twenty minutes later he was awakened by his butler ushering in Doctor Arbuthnot. For some seconds he did not know where he was, or how he had come into this luxurious room. As soon as he remembered the events of the afternoon, he looked anxiously at the doctor, and perceived that he was such a one as he would have him to be: a stout, red-faced cheerful-looking soul, of the very grade of intelligence which should make him really useful to him in the false position in which he found himself.

The doctor came briskly to the couch and greeted James Whitaker in his cheeriest bedside manner. James Whitaker's headache had not sweetened his temper, and it seemed to him a singularly inappropriate manner of addressing a man who had so lately been struck by lightning. Therefore he returned the doctor's greeting grumpily, and submitted to have his pulse felt, his temperature taken and the stethoscope applied to his chest, with a very ill grace indeed.

At the end of the examination Doctor Arbuthnot said cheerily: "No harm done—no organ injured. Just a shock from a violent stimulation of the nerves by the electricity. A sedative—a sedative will soon put all that right—soothe the nerves and stop the headache."

"A sedative! A sedative when I'm feeling so slack that I can scarcely move a limb? Nonsense, Doctor! What I want is a tonic—a strong tonic."

Out of the simple warmth of his temper, without knowing it, James Whitaker had spoken in the very manner of the late duke.

Doctor Arbuthnot hesitated a moment; then he said: "But the electricity, your Grace—"

"Bother the electricity!" cried James Whitaker, with yet more heat. "What I want is a tonic!"

"Well, if your Grace really feels that a tonic is what you want, I will prescribe a tonic. There is, of course, no fixed treatment for lightning-strokes; and probably your instinct is the best guide," said Doctor Arbuthnot, and he walked to the writing-table which stood before the next window, and took up a pen.

"But what I want most is something to clear my head. It's all muddled and confused. I know that you're Doctor Arbuthnot all right, and I know that Tomkins is Tomkins. But I'm hanged if I can remember the names of the butler or the footman, or any of the names of the other servants," said James Whitaker.

"The butler's name is Jenkinson," said Doctor Arbuthnot; and looking as profound and intelligent as he could, he added: "This loss of memory is a passing weakness, due to shock. Your Grace will probably recover from it before to-morrow morning. But anyhow, I should think that in the course of the next few days your memory will become as good as ever."

"Hadn't I better have a specialist down at once?" said James Whitaker. "Who had I better have?"

The inhabitants of the village of Little Lanchester were not wont to be troubled with affections of the brain; and at the moment Doctor Arbuthnot could not think of the name of a brain specialist, therefore he said: "You may safely wait two or three days, your Grace."

James Whitaker frowned at him, and said in a tone of the bitterest discontent: "That's all very well: but it's beastly unpleasant not to be able to remember who anybody is, or even to know the place you're in."

"You forgot that! Forgot that this is Lanchester Abbey!" cried Doctor Arbuthnot in a tone of extreme surprise.

"Well, what if it is? I can't remember my way about it," growled James Whitaker.

"Dear, dear! That's bad," said the doctor. "But it's very unlikely indeed that it will last long—very unlikely indeed."

"But while it lasts it's going to be very unpleasant," said James Whitaker. "And I don't want to be bothered about it. You'd better explain it thoroughly to Jenkinson, and tell him to see that I'm not bothered by it."

"Oh, yes, your Grace. Jenkinson will see to that—he'll see to that," said Doctor Arbuthnot cheerfully.

James Whitaker glowered at him. He felt that he had assumed the ducal attitude in a very creditable fashion.

Doctor Arbuthnot bent down and began to write the prescription.

As he finished it, James Whitaker said: "I tell you what, Doctor: it wouldn't be a bad thing if a short paragraph were sent to the papers, saying that I've been struck by lightning, and have lost my memory. Then if I do make mistakes, people will understand."

The doctor looked at him with an air of some surprise, and said: "B-b-but I thought your Grace hated the papers so."

James Whitaker frowned at him darkly for having been with him all this time, and only at this last moment thrown some light on the character of the duke.

Then he said: "Of course I hate the papers. But that's no reason why I shouldn't make use of them if I want to—if it will save me from being bothered. Who should I get to write the paragraph?"

Doctor Arbuthnot frowned, considering the matter; then he said: "Well, of course, your Grace hasn't had a secretary since Mr. Fortescue left; and I don't think Jenkinson could do it."

"I'm sure he couldn't," said James Whitaker in the tone of a man well acquainted with the butler's limitations.

The doctor's face brightened with a happy thought, and he said: "How would it be if I went round to the vicarage and saw the vicar, and asked him to write it? It's the kind of thing he likes doing."

"The very man, Doctor. Though I'll be hanged if I haven't forgotten his name! What is his name?"

"Carton, your Grace—George Carton," said the doctor.

"Of course!" cried James Whitaker. "Well, if you would go round and ask him to send a paragraph to two or three of the papers I should be very much obliged to you—and to him too."

"I will, your Grace. I will, with pleasure," said Doctor Arbuthnot heartily. "And I shall give Jenkinson this more elaborate prescription to send into Lanchester. But in the meantime I shall send up a simpler tonic from my own surgery."

He went to the door and paused to say: "Good afternoon, your Grace; good afternoon."

"Wait a minute; when are you coming to see me again?" said James Whitaker.

"Oh, I don't think your Grace will need me again. I think that, barring your memory, your Grace will be as right as a trivet in the morning."

"Oh, that won't do! That won't do! I would rather you came again this evening. Lightning-strokes are awkward things: there's no saying what the after effects may be," said James Whitaker quickly.

He thought that in the evening, when his head was clearer, he might very easily set the doctor talking to some purpose.

"By all means, your Grace—by all means. I will certainly come. I was only thinking that your Grace had told me never to pay you an unnecessary visit," said Doctor Arbuthnot.

"But this is a necessary visit," said James Whitaker with decision.

"If your Grace thinks so—if your Grace thinks so. Good-by, then, for the present, your Grace," said the doctor; and he went out beaming.

As the door closed behind him James Whitaker heaved yet another sigh of relief; he felt that he had passed his medical examination.

CHAPTER III

JAMES WHITAKER was by no means ill equipped to carry through the enterprise fortune had thrust on him. Dealers in curiosities, like booksellers, are on the whole better educated than the average tradesman (possibly their trade educates them), and he was better educated than the average dealer in curiosities. His father, a well-to-do house-agent of Hammersmith, had sent him to St. Paul's School; and though he had been far more proficient at both cricket and football than at his books, he had always occupied a respectable place rather less than half-way down his forms, and had obtained at any rate the beginning of a classical education. He had learned at school to use the English language with some precision, and since his father came from Warwick and his mother from Lincolnshire, he had acquired at home very little of the London accent. Unfortunately for him, his mother died when he was a boy of ten.

Unfortunately too, while he was still at school, his father was afflicted by a belief, wide-spread at the end of the nineteenth century, that it was possible to make money by backing horses. Like so many other people of his day, he demonstrated its falsity with such thoroughness that, at the age of sixteen, James found himself living with him in a dirty little room in a

Hammersmith slum, and in the employ of a local chemist, for whom he carried around bottles of medicine and packets of powders to the sick of the neighborhood. This change in his fortunes chiefly afflicted him by depriving him of the games he loved.

When he was seventeen his father died in the Hammersmith hospital of pneumonia, and James found himself adrift in the world, fending for himself. He was very short of kin, both on his father's side and his mother's. Indeed, he knew none of his father's relations; and of his mother's he only knew her brother, Robert Unwin. Twice he had spent a week of his summer holidays at his farm. During those two weeks he had seen quite enough of his uncle to deter him from proposing that he should go to him and become a farmer's boy.

The death of his father left him in a better position, for he was no longer called on to spend part of his insufficient wages on satisfying the craving for drink which his father had chiefly acquired on the race-courses round London. But he found himself very lonely, for he had been fond in his undemonstrative, almost sullen way of his genial and cheery father, who was so strong a contrast to himself. Two months later he left the service of the chemist and entered that of William Ward, the owner of a curiosity shop in Watergate Street.

Here he was in a much better position. The wages were only two dollars a week, but he slept in an attic at the top of the house, and took his meals with the old servant, Amy. She was a cross-grained old

woman; and it had for years been her chief pleasure in life to nag her master's assistant for the time being. She had, indeed, had the pleasure of driving three of them, solely in her master's interests, of course, out of his employ. On James Whitaker her nagging made no impression; at the end of three months of it, it is probable that he did not hear a word of it. Beyond nagging she dare not go with him. She had once swept a book he was reading off the kitchen table on to the floor, and he had treated her to a display of black fury which had made her afraid even to nag him for a week.

William Ward himself was, as masters go, an easy man to work for. He had an even temper; he was reasonable and not exacting. He was fond of talking during the long intervals when there were no customers in the shop; and James Whitaker was the perfect listener. Much of William Ward's talk was of his business: the battles at auctions or in the auction-rooms, the acquisitions of bargains, the pastes of porcelains, the forging of old furniture and so forth. Since he was fond of illustrating his talk with examples to hand, he was teaching James Whitaker the business in the way he could best learn it. He was not, indeed, greatly interested in it at first; but he chanced to have the genuine seeing eye of the connoisseur; and he was learning it in spite of that lack of interest. He was far more pleased with this post than with his post of chemist's boy, for he had his evenings, his Sundays and his Saturday afternoons free. He resumed his football on the turf, or rather

the mud, of a kind of small recreation ground at the bottom of the Stamford Brook Road. It was but poor football after the football of St. Paul's School, but it was better than none at all; and when he was nineteen and his wages had risen to three dollars a week, he joined a club called the Hammersmith Tigers, which played at Wormwood Scrubbs.

With the fourth member of the household, William Ward's daughter Millicent, James Whitaker came very little into contact. She was a sandy-haired, sharp-featured, anemic, somewhat querulous girl, a year younger than he; and for the first two years he worked for her father she was away, a boarder at Brixmouth High School. He saw her during the holidays only, and now and again he did odd jobs for her, put up a shelf in her bedroom, strapped up her trunk and carried it down-stairs, changed the novels, of which she read a great number, at Boots' in King Street, fetched her a rare cab. She awoke no interest in him; and he awoke none in her.

Always, however, in the background of his mind, for the most part very far in the background, was the memory of the better life he had enjoyed before his father's downfall. He had lapsed a long way in William Ward's kitchen from the standard of refinement of St. Paul's, and even from that of his own home. But memories of that refinement remained with him; and now and again he would for a while speak with the better pronunciation and intonation of his earlier boyhood. It was these outbursts, added to his greater skill in the game, which gave him uncommon prom-

inence among the Hammersmith Tigers, and presently invested him with the captaincy of the team.

But he had passed his twentieth birthday before it was borne in upon him quite clearly that the wages he was receiving and was likely to receive were not nearly enough to satisfy his wants and desires; and he began to cast about how to better his chances in life. He came to the conclusion that he must be better educated if he would increase his income. The Hammersmith Polytechnic afforded opportunities of becoming educated; and he began to attend night classes there in French, German, bookkeeping and English. He found that that part of his mind which acquired a knowledge of languages had grown uncommonly rusty.

Millicent Ward had at this time left school about three months, but she had brought from it ideals of culture, and she also attended the English classes at the polytechnic. She had never taken any interest in her father's robust, rugged-featured assistant: he was so far removed from the refined and gentlemanly ideal of her dreams. The sudden discovery that he also was imbibing culture at an English class awoke her interest in him. She did not feel at all shy with him, for he was an inferior; and the next day she questioned him about his purpose in attending the polytechnic classes, and learned his intention of educating himself.

With the young women who throng King Street of an evening, James Whitaker had had nothing to do. They did not attract him. Sometimes when he was walking with one of the Hammersmith Tigers, they

would meet a couple of female acquaintances of his companion; an introduction would follow, and the four of them would split up into pairs. James Whitaker, leader as he was in the football field, was uncommonly shy and ill at ease on the primrose path of dalliance; and this shyness stayed with him.

He was less shy with Millicent Ward than he was with the girls of his own station; for one thing, she was his superior, for another, they had common educational interests. For a while she contented herself with inquiring now and again about his progress. Then she conceived the idea of helping him. Since he did not feel shy with her, he accepted her offer with the utmost readiness. There was leisure and to spare in the curiosity shop, save when William Ward had made purchases at a sale, and they were busy mending and cleaning objects of art, or dirtying others with a view to investing them with that air of antiquity the connoisseur demands. There were, indeed, hours to spend on James Whitaker's education; and though Millicent was a poor teacher, his knowledge of French and German and English increased at a satisfactory speed. His knowledge of bookkeeping increased as quickly; but that was not owing to any effort of Millicent Ward. She was only interested in culture.

After a while she began to take him to picture-galleries, chiefly to South Kensington Museum. She went to it by train, and he walked to it. She was somewhat annoyed by the firmness with which he refused to devote his Saturday afternoons to culture,

and reserved them for football in the winter and for cricket or walks into the country in the summer. But she made the best of Sundays. He had the docile and impressionable mind of youth, and readily accepted her view of the paramount importance of culture; but his spirit demanded the stirring rivalry of games, and his intellectual desires had to yield to it. Besides devoting Saturday afternoons to games, he wasted many an evening he might have spent in improving his mind, on boxing and gymnastics at the polytechnic.

It is difficult for a boy of twenty-one and a girl of twenty to be thrown into close companionship without their emotions being stirred by it. Neither James nor Millicent were free from human frailty; and they fell in love with each other. It was not by any means a violent passion in either. Millicent was the anemic, flat-chested, passionless girl of the worse parts of the modern town. Her feeling toward James Whitaker was little more than a sense of proprietorship in him, arising from the pains she had spent on his culture. It would probably have rested there but for the discovery that his father had been a well-to-do estate agent, and that James himself had been at school at St. Paul's, a discovery which invested him with a tinge of the romance of the disinherited.

James' feeling for her was hardly stronger; though her delicacy appealed to his protective instinct, she was too thin-blooded to make the genuine strong appeal to a man of his healthy robustness. But she was cultured; and marriage with her would be a distinct

social and economic advance. They drifted into a secret engagement. Then, when a paralytic stroke rendered William Ward helpless, and the whole conduct of the business fell into the hands of James Whitaker, they became openly engaged. A year and a half later William Ward died, and two months after his death and a month after his own twenty-third birthday, James Whitaker married her.

The five years of their married life had been neither happy nor unhappy. They were ill-mated; but since that was the rule in their class, and since both of them realized clearly that they had not enough money to secure the mate of their desire, they rebelled but seldom and with little violence against their wedded lot. On the whole they made the best of it. Millicent, as far as her capacity and lack of real interest in domestic matters allowed, saw to James' comfort. She even acted as saleswoman with moderate success when he was away at an auction. For his part, he humored her efforts to maintain and increase her prenuptial culture, and was indulgent with her not infrequent failures as a housewife. But there was none of that close intimacy between them which comes of genuine sympathy. None the less, James Whitaker was better content married than he had been as a bachelor; his was a domesticated nature.

During those five years Millicent's health grew worse and worse; and she grew more and more querulous. Her bad health was to a great extent the result of a poor physique and bad teeth; but she made it worse by taking drugs without ceasing. For the most part

her day began with strychnine and ended with chloral; and at intervals during it she further injured her stomach or her nerves. Her habit of taking chloral to induce sleep had so grown on her that now she hardly ever slept at night without it; and it had indeed played havoc with her nerves.

But all the while she was growing more and more intellectual; and though James Whitaker sometimes protested quite vainly against the chloral, he always fostered patiently her intellectual growth. He took her to the gallery of the opera-house to hear the operas of Wagner, to the galleries of theaters to hear the comedies of Shaw, to the Hammersmith Ethical Society to hear the lectures of the Chestertons, and he read the novels of Mrs. Humphrey Ward that she might be able to discuss them with him. He listened patiently to her unfolding of the mysteries of theosophy which she had taken up for her final explanation of the cosmic scheme; and he even employed the arithmetical facility he had acquired at the bookkeeping classes at the polytechnic to work out her astrological calculations for her when she made that science her hobby. With a praiseworthy perseverance he concealed the fact that she bored him and in every way failed to satisfy him. But she often complained frankly that she found him too gross for her refined nature and too slow of understanding for her brighter wits.

The business of the shop, which had been poor for years, grew steadily worse. The private customers of William Ward had died off; and the people who now

passed down Watergate Street collected but the cheapest objects of art. James Whitaker added to the business the selling of second-hand furniture. At first it prospered, but after a while it grew poor, for the hire-purchase system was more and more spoiling the second-hand trade. Consequently he suffered from a sense that two things were lacking in his life—love and money. He was far more patient with his wife than he was with his business. His failure in it enraged him; and his effort to borrow five hundred dollars from his uncle rose from his conviction that his only chance was to make a fresh start in a more frequented street.

But now that it came to the matter of playing the duke for a day or two, both his wife and his business were likely to prove of use to him. Association with her had kept his speech from roughness and prevented him from acquiring the careless table manners of less fortunately married tradesmen; and the battles of the auctions and sales rooms, with buyers and with sellers, had gifted him with no little capacity for dealing with men.

As Doctor Arbuthnot's steps died away down the corridor, James Whitaker was thinking that he had learned very little from him. It seemed to him that he had better lose no time learning more. His head was still aching, but the brandy and soda and the short sleep had refreshed him. He slipped off the couch and set out to seek knowledge.

There were two doors to his bedroom, the one

through which he had come, opening into the corridor, and the other in the left wall. He went to the latter and opened it, and found himself in a large dressing-room, the end of which had been partitioned off to form a bathroom. He was impressed and delighted by the four shelves on which stood more than twenty pairs of the duke's boots, but he did not linger to admire them. He opened the door that faced the one by which he had entered, and found himself where he wished to be, in the sitting-room, rather a smoking-room than a study, of the duke.

He went quickly back and bolted the doors which opened into the corridor from the bedroom, the dressing-room and the study itself. Then he went briskly to the fine Chippendale bureau which stood between the two windows. It was open, and its inside was in a state of untidiness which chafed James Whitaker's strong sense of propriety. But lying prominent on the blotting-pad was a sight which thrilled him with joy; three stamped and addressed letters.

He sat down before the bureau and took up the topmost. It was addressed to Lord Ashow, began "Dear Herbert," and was signed "Lanchester." Plainly it was an answer to the letter signed "Herbert," in his pocket. The second was addressed to Lady Cubbington, began "My dear Anne," and was signed "John." James Whitaker had learned his Christian name. He was pleased to have learned it, and he was not at all displeased by it: John seemed to him as good a name as James. But apart from this, the letter was inter-

esting. It was couched in as affectionate terms as the letter in his pocket signed "Anne," and he wondered whether Lady Cubbington was a relation of the duke. He hoped that she was, but something in the tone of the letter awoke a misgiving in him, and he feared that she was not. Yet she might be a widow. He hoped sincerely that he would not find himself involved in any matrimonial entanglements, for he felt that he had had too little experience in these matters to have much chance of extricating himself from them in a really creditable manner.

He turned from the consideration of this subject to the third letter, and found it the most useful of the three. It was addressed to Messrs. Moresby Brothers, Tailors, Bruton Street, London, W., and contained a check for two hundred sixty-seven dollars and fifty cents in payment of their account.

Also it contained an order for three suits of clothes, with careful directions about their color and material. But the check was the important thing; and James Whitaker examined it with joyful eyes. He noted carefully the way in which it was made out; and after a careful consideration of it, he set himself to practise the reproduction of the signature. But soon he found that his hand was still too shaky for accurate writing, and perceived that he must postpone his practise till the morrow. He put the check and the letters in his pocket and began to look through the drawers of the bureau. They were all very untidy, and contained many papers dealing with matters of the estate and the duke's private affairs. James Whitaker was not in a

condition to profit by them; he looked through them cursorily, and put them back in the drawers.

The two bottom drawers of the right-hand side of the bureau were locked; but since the duke's keys were lying in one of the pigeonholes, he had no difficulty in opening them. In these drawers neatness reigned; they were full of letters in packets, tied up with red tape. He was distressed to find they were addressed to the duke, that most of them began "Dearest John" (some of them "Darling John,") that they were all from women, each packet from a different woman, and that all of them were couched in terms of the warmest affection.

He closed the two drawers quickly and locked them. Then he sat back, considering this unpleasant situation in something of a panic. At the moment he was beyond words glad that he was only going to be a duke for three days; and he was more than a little sorry that he had arranged that the vicar should despatch a paragraph to the newspapers informing the world that he had been struck by lightning and had lost his memory. He feared lest some of the ladies who had addressed his predecessor as "Dearest John," or, worse still, as "Darling John," should make haste to recall themselves to his memory—more than one at a time.

Saddened by this discovery, he returned with a furtive step (as if the ladies were already on his track) to his bedroom, unlocking the doors opening into the corridor as he went. He composed himself to sleep on the couch once more; but he did not fall asleep as quickly as he wished. He was still harassed by the dis-

covery of his predecessor's catholicity (he felt in his bones that the ladies were of many types) of taste; but presently he did fall asleep.

He awoke in about an hour to find himself very hungry, rose and rang the bell.

It was answered by a stout, genial-looking young man whom he perceived must be his valet, Tomkins.

The young man at once became voluble, and in the London speech which James Whitaker knew so well.

"I'm sorry your Grace has had this horful—orful—accident," he said. "And I'm sorry I was out when your Grace came home—"

"Yes, but I'm hungry," said James Whitaker, cutting him short in a very grumpy tone.

"Yes, your Grace. Jenkinson thought it better to let your Grace have your sleep out since, he said, you looked so shaky. But tea's all ready. He's bringing it up as soon as it's made."

"And where's that tonic Doctor Arbuthnot was going to send up to me?" growled James Whitaker.

"Here, your Grace, here," said Tomkins, holding out a bottle in one hand and a medicine glass in the other. "I'd better give your Grace a dose of it at once."

With that he poured out a dose of the tonic, added the prescribed quantity of water and handed it to him.

He had hardly drunk it when the door opened and Jenkinson entered, bearing the tea, a very grateful sight to the hungry James Whitaker. The butler set the tray on the table beside the couch and lifted the lid

from the dish of buttered toast. James Whitaker seized a piece greedily and, in his hunger, was on the very point of wolfing it down, when he remembered that he was a duke. Thereupon he ate it in a delicate, even finicking manner. Jenkinson and Tomkins watched him with eyes full of interest: the fact that he had so recently been struck by lightning was very present in their minds. As he took a second piece of toast Jenkinson poured cream into the cup and then poured the tea into it. James Whitaker perceived that he did not put any sugar into it; then he perceived that there was no sugar. Unsweetened tea was abhorrent to him.

"There's no sugar," he said in the grump husky tones he was using.

"But your Grace never takes sugar!" said Jenkinson in lively surprise.

James Whitaker saw that he had made a slip; but he said firmly: "I feel to want it. It must be the effect of the electricity. I expect I'm still charged with it; and my system requires sugar."

The explanation, fortified as it was by the scientific and, as James Whitaker well knew, inaccurate term "electricity," seemed quite satisfactory to both of them. They looked at him with commiserating eyes; Jenkinson said hastily: "Yes, your Grace," and hurried out of the room to fetch the sugar.

For the benefit of his valet James Whitaker ate the second piece of toast in the same delicate and finicking manner as he had eaten the first. Jenkinson returned soon bringing a sugar-basin, and stood over him while

he ate the toast and drank the tea. James Whitaker wondered whether it had been the custom of the duke always to have some one standing over him while he took his tea. It seemed to him a tiresome custom; but he did not think it worth while to protest.

When he had finished, he said: "Did Doctor Arbuthnot explain that I had lost my memory?"

"Yes, your Grace; but he said as how it would be sure to come back in a day or two," said Tomkins quickly.

"I hope it will," growled James Whitaker. "But it's very unpleasant; and I expect I shall want teaching everything like a little child."

"Oh, your Grace will soon learn," said Jenkinson.

"I dare say," growled James Whitaker.

He felt much better for his tea, and dismissed Jenkinson. Tomkins stood awaiting his orders; and a happy thought came to James Whitaker.

"I don't see why you shouldn't help me to get my memory back, Tomkins," he said grumpily. "Now, let's see what I can remember about yesterday. Tell me exactly what I did yesterday. Begin at my getting up—what time did I get up? What did I do after breakfast and in the afternoon?" said James Whitaker.

"Well, your Grace got up at half past eight; you had breakfast at half past nine; and a little while after breakfast you saw Mr. Brinkman."

"Who's Mr. Brinkman?" James Whitaker broke in.

"He's your steward, your Grace—the steward as manages the Lanchester Abbey estate. Then you went

for a ride and came back to lunch; and in the afternoon you motored over to Muttlebury Court, and played bridge—leastways I suppose your Grace played auction. And you came back to dinner. And after dinner Mr. Lowther motored over from the Grange, and you played billiards with him till nearly twelve o'clock."

James Whitaker was annoyed by this versatility of his predecessor. On the very first inquiry he had learned of his having three accomplishments, riding, bridge and billiards, none of which he possessed himself. It was plain, therefore, that he would have to make some radical changes in his predecessor's habits; and that was the last thing in the world he wished to do. But there was no help for it. He could not ride; indeed he had never been on a horse in his life. Also he had never touched a billiard cue. He had little doubt that his predecessor, devoting himself to these pursuits from his earliest years, had been a skilful rider and a skilful billiard player. It would take him years to arrive at the same point of skill; and in the meantime his inaptness would continuously excite remark. His best course was to drop riding and billiards altogether, for though he knew little of psychology, he thought it probable that muscle memory was the last memory one would lose; and it would be dangerous indeed to show himself to have lost his muscle memory in these matters altogether.

Bridge was another matter: he was no card-player, but he knew that a knowledge of card games could be acquired from books; and it might be wise to learn

bridge. Then he remembered that he was only going to play the duke for two or three days. It was odd how difficult he found it to keep this fact in his mind.

He pondered the information which Tomkins had given him for four or five minutes. Then leaving him setting out his clothes for dinner, he went down-stairs to begin his exploration of the Abbey. His heart at once began to swell proudly with the sense that he was the possessor of these magnificent rooms, so full of beautiful things—costly beautiful things. He had a real feeling for beauty; but he had been for so long harried by money worries that even now, when he found himself the unembarrassed, if temporary, possessor of these beautiful things, he could not help regarding them with the appraising eye of the dealer. He could not help translating their value into dollars and cents, or rather, to be exact, into hundreds of dollars, or thousands of dollars; for the Lanchester heirlooms, pictures, sculptures, tapestries, armor, bronzes and ivories are as fine as any in England. Once more forgetting that he was only playing the duke for three days, he promised himself several weeks of pleasure from their contemplation.

But at the moment it was chiefly the dealer's need to put a price on beautiful things that kept him inside the Abbey. Through the long open windows came the fresh delightful smell of the earth, rejoicing after the storm, the fragrance of the flowers, the song of the birds; and now that his head was clear and most of his weariness removed by sleep, they called him out into the gardens with a stronger appeal of beauty;

and at last he went out through one of the windows of the blue drawing-room on to the terrace. He walked across the lawn to the white marble balustrade, so carefully kept, and looked down on mile on mile of meadow and woodland, brightened here and there by a gleaming reach of the Wyper. He leaned upon the balustrade, feasting his town-weary eyes on the glorious scene; and once more his heart swelled at the thought that he was the owner of it. He stood striving to grasp what these great possessions might mean for him.

He was interrupted by the sound of a gong, and took it that it was the gong for dinner. He went back into the Abbey, and in the great hall he learned from Jenkinson that it was the dressing-gong, that dinner would be in half an hour. He went up to his bedroom and found Tomkins awaiting him with his evening clothes set out ready to put on. Tomkins told him that his bath was ready, and he went to it eagerly, wishing that he had thought of taking one sooner. He locked the dressing-room door that Tomkins might have no chance of perceiving how different his feet were from those of his predecessor.

The bath cleared his head yet more, so that when he came out of it, his headache had nearly gone. Tomkins hovered about him while he dressed; but while he was putting on his collar, he went to fetch him a rose from the garden, and James Whitaker found himself confronted with the difficulty of tying his white tie. He perceived that this was a muscle memory; and his having forgotten how to do it would look bad, for

doubtless, after his long experience, his predecessor had tied his white tie faultlessly. But he himself had never been able to tie a bow with any neatness in his life; and he crumpled it badly. He was regarding the result of his efforts ruefully, when Tomkins came back, bringing a rosebud set in a spray of maidenhair fern. He started in surprise at the sight of James Whitaker and said:

"Your Grace has forgotten that, too!"

"Forgotten what?" growled James Whitaker.

"That your Grace can't tie a white tie, and I always tie it for you," said Tomkins; and he hurried to a drawer, and took out another.

James Whitaker was indeed interested to hear that the likeness between him and his predecessor was so close as to extend even to this trivial incapacity. Their resemblance in this trifle touched him; and for the first time he felt a sense of sympathy with the man who was lying under the great oak on the hill in the wood. Also he was relieved to learn that he was not called upon to tie his own white ties.

Tomkins tied the tie; James Whitaker put on his coat and waistcoat and went down-stairs. He found that he was to dine in a charming room, called from its paneling the cedar dining-room; and he sat down at the table gleaming with silver and glass and bright with flowers, with a fine sense of being luxurious. He was hungry, but he did not allow his hunger to overcome his discretion; and under the eyes of Jenkinson he ate his food in a somewhat mincing fashion. It was the meal of a dream, yet a simple enough meal: a clear

soup, boiled salmon, a young chicken, gooseberry tart and cheese straws. But to James Whitaker it was the last cry of luxury; never before in his life had he eaten delicate food, properly cooked.

The hock and the champagne were excellent; but he was careful to drink no more than a glass of hock and two glasses of champagne, for he was resolved to have his wits always about him. When dinner was at an end, he sat drinking his coffee, sipping a glass of '65 brandy, and smoking a large and admirable cigar, in a glorious, beatific content.

He drank his coffee and brandy slowly, then he said to Jenkinson: "I wonder if there's any chance of Mr. Lowther coming over to play billiards to-night."

"I can't say, your Grace. You don't remember whether you asked him to come or not, your Grace?" said Jenkinson.

"I don't," said James Whitaker with decision. "But if he does come, you can tell him that I have been struck by lightning and don't want to see anybody —don't feel up to it—anybody except the doctor, that is. Oh, yes: and say I'm sorry to have brought him over for nothing. Where's my cigar-case?"

Jenkinson brought him a cigar-case, and he put three of the fine large cigars into it. Then he told Jenkinson to take a large comfortable chair out on the terrace for him, and another for Doctor Arbuthnot, and bring whisky and brandy and soda when he came. Jenkinson brought the chairs to the end of the terrace. James Whitaker sat down and looked dreamily out over the moonlit landscape. For a while he pondered

the admirable dinner he had eaten. Then he resolved that, unless anything untoward which he could not at the moment foresee, happened, he would play the delightful part of the Duke of Lanchester for four or five days, instead of for two or three. After all, he was in an extraordinarily advantageous position: he could disappear so easily and utterly into a natural hiding-place there was no finding.

Presently the excellent dinner he had enjoyed set his mind working; and a very happy thought came to him. He would rid himself of the possibility of riding or playing billiards by asking Doctor Arbuthnot to treat him for a numb, partly paralyzed right arm. Then he need never mount a horse, or touch a cue. Then came another happy thought: he would also have Doctor Arbuthnot treat him for a stiffness of the muscles of his throat: that would account for any difference in his voice from that of the late duke.

Presently Doctor Arbuthnot came, felt his pulse, took his temperature, and expressed his approval of both. Then James Whitaker told him of the stiffness of his arm and the muscles of his throat.

Doctor Arbuthnot listened to him with a grave face, and said: "I was expecting something of the kind. In fact, I noticed a change in your Grace's voice—not merely that it was husky, but that it was deeper in tone. But I expect that we shall be able to deal with it. The stiffness will probably yield to salicylate. Of course it is too early for your Grace to have recovered your memory at all?"

"I remember some things and forget others," said James Whitaker quickly. "I suppose I had better rest my arm till the stiffness goes—if it does go. How would it be if I were to wear it in a sling?"

He thought it would be a good thing if he were thus to advertise the fact that it was impossible for him to ride or play billiards.

"By all means. Your Grace couldn't do better than carry it in a sling till we see how the salicylate works," said Doctor Arbuthnot cheerily.

"Then I will," said James Whitaker.

Jenkinson came, bringing the whisky and soda. James Whitaker invited the doctor to help himself to a drink and gave him a cigar. Doctor Arbuthnot was deeply impressed and flattered by the attention; the late duke had never so unbent; and his heart warmed toward his illustrious patient.

When the doctor had taken his first drink of the whisky and soda, James Whitaker said glumly: "It's odd that you should know more about me than I know about myself."

"It is indeed, your Grace," said the doctor. "Is there anything your Grace wants particularly to know?"

"There are many things I want particularly to know," said James Whitaker, even more glumly.

"Well—er—as a matter of fact—living so near all these years—and attending the family when they were at the Abbey—and yourself when you had the measles—I have taken a natural interest in your career.

Besides, I have always been hearing about your Grace. Naturally everybody around the Abbey takes a great interest in you."

"Then I'll tell you what: I wish you'd tell me all about myself, beginning at the beginning—from the time I was born," said James Whitaker firmly.

Doctor Arbuthnot needed no pressing; he was beyond words delighted to be of other than professional service to his illustrious patient. Even by the light of the moon James Whitaker could see his ruddy face darken with the flush of pleasure, and the pleased sparkle of his eyes.

He did begin at the beginning; indeed he began by saying: "Your Grace was born on the fifteenth of June, 1882"; and as he unfolded the history of the late duke it grew clear that he had indeed given it his best attention. It presently struck James Whitaker that it bore a curious resemblance to his own history. There was not only the coincidence of date in their births, but also of place: the duke's mother had been taken by surprise; and he had been born at a hotel in Kensington, within a hundred yards of the house in which he had himself been born. The duke had gone to Eton the same term as he himself had gone to St. Paul's School, and he had become duke at about the same time as he himself had been set adrift on the world to earn his own living. He had married in the June (the doctor could not remember the day) of the same year in which he himself had married in June; and though the doctor grew very discreet and diplomatic in talking of his married

life, it was clear that he had married the wrong woman. The duchess, however, had died within two years of their marriage. Also it was clear that the duke had been as unsuccessful in politics as James Whitaker had been in business. The coincidences were curious; and then there was the most striking coincidence of all: they had both been struck by the same flash of lightning.

For all his wife's astrology, James Whitaker was no believer in the influence of the stars on human destinies; but he could not help thinking of the ironmonger who had been born within three minutes of George III, had, in his sphere, enjoyed the same fortunes and suffered the same vicissitudes as that monarch, and had expired about the same moment. He was no believer in the influence of the stars . . . yet that ironmonger had been the very image of George III. It was odd that rather more than a hundred years later he should find like coincidences in his own life and that of the late Duke of Lanchester.

He kept the doctor's story plain and clear by an occasional question. James Whitaker enjoyed an excellent memory; but if he had not enjoyed that excellent memory, he would have had no need of a note-book, since the story so interested him that every important fact in it at once impressed itself clearly and deeply on his mind.

When it came to an end he said: "I wonder if that lightning-stroke has changed my character and disposition at all. What kind of a disposition have I?"

The doctor hesitated and with an air of some dis-

comfort fidgeted in his chair; then he said: "Well—I—er—I should say that your Grace had an—er—er—an eminently ducal disposition."

"A bit nasty? Eh?" said James Whitaker.

"No—no—not nasty—oh, no," said the doctor.

"A bit short in the temper, then?"

"Well—a little impatient, perhaps," said the doctor, in the tone of one making a generous admission.

"Well, I don't seem to have changed in that respect, anyhow," said James Whitaker. "I'm still quite short in the temper."

"I don't know about that," said the doctor quickly. "I fancied that your Grace had become more genial. But that mightn't be the result of the stroke. I haven't seen your Grace—not to talk to, at least—for nearly a year."

James Whitaker pondered this matter for nearly a minute. Plainly the husky growling he had adopted had been well in accord with his predecessor's character. Then he said: "And what about women?"

Doctor Arbuthnot rose hastily and snatched his watch out of his pocket: "Oh, there have been stories, your Grace—there have been stories. But I never paid any attention to them—never," he said quickly, and in a very uneasy voice. "But I beg your Grace's pardon—but I was quite forgetting—a patient—a very difficult case—my visit is already overdue. I must rush away—I must really."

"Of course—of course. Good night, Doctor—good night," said James Whitaker, holding out his hand.

The doctor shook it warmly and bade him good night warmly. Then he hurried along the terrace, down the steps and across the garden to the gate opening into the park. Once in it and buried, as he believed, in shades of night James Whitaker perceived that the glowing end of his cigar moved more slowly. He suspected that the doctor breathed the deep sigh of a man who has escaped from a very awkward situation. He frowned deeply: plainly women were the fly, or rather the flies, in the ointment.

CHAPTER IV

JAMES WHITAKER sat for a while longer, gazing out over the moonlit landscape with much less pleasure. Then he rose and went gloomily into the Abbey. He went gloomily to bed; and his last thought was that, in view of these women, it was probably a very good thing indeed that he was only to play the duke for four or five days.

He awoke next morning in a far more cheerful spirit. His weariness had gone; his headache had gone; and he was filled with the liveliest expectation of pleasant things. He found that it was only half past seven, rose and drew up the blinds. The sunlight came streaming into the room; and in the morning haze the scene beneath his eyes was of another beauty. The air was ringing with the songs of skylarks soaring above the park, and the thrushes and blackbirds and finches in the trees in the gardens. He piled his pillows on the top of the cushions from the easy chairs, so that he could lie and look out of the window, and again stretched himself out luxuriously in bed. By turns he dozed and enjoyed the beauty of the morning with a growing sense of luxury, till Tomkins came, bringing tea.

For the moment James Whitaker became the dealer again, and appraised the old silver teapot and cream-

jug at at least eight dollars and seventy-five cents the ounce, the old Worcester teacup and saucer at ten dollars and twenty-five cents. Then only did his eye begin to take its pleasure in them. But it hurt him to see them in actual use, exposed to the careless treatment of servants. That feeling soon passed in the enjoyment of the delicate China tea, the cream, and the thin, thickly-buttered slices of brown bread.

When he had finished, Tomkins brought him cigarettes, and he smoked one with the most luxurious pleasure while the valet busied himself in the dressing-room, setting out his clothes for the morning. James Whitaker accepted his suggestions about the suit he should wear. Then the happy thought came to him to bid Tomkins have at hand the coat which had been burned by the lightning, to show to any reporters who might come down from the London papers. This gave him a good pretext for explaining that the lightning, striking him about the right shoulder, had numbed and stiffened his arm, and had also deepened his voice by stiffening the muscles of his throat. He felt it to be most important that the servants should have the right story. Then he bade him find a scarf of some kind to make a sling for his arm.

Tomkins went to the bathroom and presently came back to say that the bath was ready. James Whitaker was careful to slip his feet into slippers without letting Tomkins see them. He lingered in his bath, enjoying it exceedingly. He had never before been in a big procelain bath fitted with a spray and a spinal douche, and he played with them. Never before had he dried

himself on such a large and satisfactory bath towel. He was surprised to find not only a clean shirt, but also clean underlinen, or, to be exact, undersilk, set out for him to wear: since the day was Thursday, it looked as if the duke had had fresh underlinen every day. He put on the pants and waistcoat and socks with a full pleasure in their softness.

Then he put on his dressing-gown again, went to the dressing-room door and said to Tomkins: "What about shaving? Where are my razors?"

"I'm waiting to shave your Grace," said Tomkins.

When he had been shaved, he was careful to ask Tomkins whether the lightning had made any difference to his skin or the growth of his beard. Tomkins assured him that it had not. In a tone of relief, James Whitaker asked at what time he breakfasted. He learned that there was no fixed hour, that he could breakfast whenever he liked; and he bade Tomkins tell Jenkinson that he would breakfast in half an hour. Then he went out into the gardens and strolled about them, exploring and enjoying them. The breakfast-gong called him from his exploration, and he enjoyed the excellent breakfast thoroughly.

He felt that Jenkinson was the proper imposing person to deal with any reporters who might come; and at breakfast he instructed him to see to the matter, and further to see that he himself was not troubled by them. After breakfast, as he smoked one of the fine Coronas, he examined with loving appreciation the oriental treasures in lacquer and metal and ivory in the yellow drawing-room.

The Abbey was indeed a glorious place, and the life of a duke a glorious life. He saw that if use should blunt his pleasure in the material luxuries, the countless beautiful things it held would be a joy to him for years. He was of a sudden grieved by the thought that in four or five days he would be leaving them to another possessor, who would assuredly not appreciate them as fully as he.

Then he betook himself to the duke's sitting-room, thinking that he had better set about acquiring some more knowledge to strengthen his position. He examined the papers in the bureau. He did not obtain from them much information about his predecessor's life, but every piece of knowledge of it, however trifling, he could acquire might prove useful to him. Indeed, a display of knowledge of some intimate trifle might easily stand him in better stead than a display of knowledge of some more important matter. It was hardly likely that in the four or five days he proposed to remain at the Abbey he would be called upon to display such knowledge; yet it was always possible that he might; and he went through the papers the more carefully because at the back of his mind was the feeling that he might change his mind and stay a week. The longer he stayed the more people he would meet.

He was surprised not to find much more money in the bureau. Then he bethought himself that these old bureaus were nearly always fitted with secret drawers; and with his knowledge of old furniture he was not long finding two of them. In the larger were one hundred and sixty-five dollars in gold; in the smaller

four hundred dollars in bank-notes. He left the money where it was. He did not know what he would do about it. With regard to the money in his pocket he did not hesitate: Millicent must have some money to go on with. He found a sheet of paper without an address stamped on it and wrote to her that he would not be home for some days, and that it was no use giving her an address to write to, for he would be moving about. He enclosed fifty dollars. She would naturally come to the conclusion that Robert Unwin had lent him the five hundred dollars. He had finished the letter and addressed it when Jenkinson came to him and said that Mr. Brinkman had come and was in the office.

"In the office? I've forgotten where the office is. What a beastly nuisance this loss of memory is!" growled James Whitaker.

"Yes, your Grace. But Doctor Arbuthnot says that you will have it back in a few days," said Jenkinson in a soothing tone. "Shall I tell Mr. Brinkman to come to your Grace?"

"No. I'll come along to the office. I may as well know where it is," growled James Whitaker, rising.

Jenkinson led the way down-stairs, across the big hall and through a door at the back of it, into a long corridor, which, from the smell of cooking which came down it, plainly led to the kitchens. He opened the first door on the left, and ushered James Whitaker into a small room furnished as an office. A safe stood in the corner, and on the shelves of a bookcase, against the left-hand wall, were the ledgers in which the ac-

counts of the estate were kept. At a desk on the right-hand side of the room sat the steward.

"Good morning, Brinkman," said James Whitaker, in the deep husky tones he was using, and he considered Mr. Brinkman's face attentively, for here, probably, was a man of keener intelligence than the servants with whom he had come into contact.

"Good morning, your Grace," said the steward, rising quickly, and rubbing his hands together. "I hope your Grace is getting over your unfortunate accident. A providential escape—truly providential."

James Whitaker saw that he would do well to be careful of Mr. Brinkman. A lean keen-faced man with shifty ferrety eyes, high cheek-bones, and thin lips which closed tightly at the end of each sentence, he looked acute indeed.

"Yes, I suppose I was lucky," growled James Whitaker. "But it's quite bad enough as it is, with a stiff arm and a stiff throat; to say nothing of the fact that it's muddled my head so abominably that I never know what I am going to remember and what I am going to forget."

"Dear, dear! That must be annoying, your Grace —very annoying indeed," said the steward sympathetically; and James Whitaker saw a swiftly passing gleam of satisfaction in his eye, as if his employer's infirmity was not wholly unpleasant to him. Then he went on: "But Doctor Arbuthnot says that your Grace will soon recover."

"I hope so," growled James Whitaker, walking to the window, thrusting his hands into his trousers

pockets, and staring out of it. "Is there anything you want to see me about?"

"There's only that matter of Longmeadow Farm. Wyse writes that he can not possibly find the money this month to pay the two quarters' rent he owes, so that there is really no reason why your Grace should not turn him out and let Greaves have his farm as well as the River Farm. He will turn the bulk of it into arable land, and increase its value."

James Whitaker felt an instant sympathy with the man who could not pay his rent, and said: "Yes, but I don't remember exactly. Why is it Wyse can't pay?"

"Ah, I suppose your Grace has forgotten that he runs a big milk business. He supplies half Lanchester with milk; and the dry summer of last year hit him very hard. In fact, he declares that it practically meant three winters' running; for he has had to feed his cows on hay and cake, not only for the last two winters, but most of last summer as well, since there was no grass. Of course, if your Grace liked to wait for the rent, he is nearly sure to recover and pay off the arrears, though he really did over-extend his business without enough capital."

"Then why turn him out?" growled James Whitaker.

"Because Greaves is willing to pay your Grace fifteen per cent. more rent for Longmeadow Farm. Indeed, it seems almost providential that Wyse should have come to grief in this way."

"Fifteen per cent.? What does that come to in money?" growled James Whitaker.

"Twelve hundred dollars, your Grace."

James Whitaker thought a while. He must move carefully; then he said: "Well, why haven't we turned Wyse out before this?"

"Because the Wyses have lived at Longmeadow Farm for over two hundred years; and your Grace was hesitating because there would be a good deal of unpleasant talk, and a certain amount of unpopularity if he was turned out."

"Ah, yes: I remember now. I must think it over," said James Whitaker, and he walked up and down the room, frowning.

Then he stopped in front of the safe and looked into it. On the topmost shelf were three bank-books. He then took them out, and said casually: "I have quite forgotten what my balance is."

He looked through the three bank-books. One of them was a current account at the Lanchester bank, which was evidently the estate account. There was a balance in his favor of thirty-seven hundred and fifteen dollars. The second bank-book contained his current account at Coutts' bank; there was a balance of seventeen hundred dollars in his favor, and he perceived that five thousand dollars had been paid into it every month. The third bank-book contained his deposit account at Coutts' bank; and he found that he had thirty-five thousand dollars on deposit there.

He put them back into the safe and said: "Twelve hundred dollars are twelve hundred dollars."

"That was what your Grace said on Saturday," said Mr. Brinkman quickly; and James Whitaker was

thankful to him for throwing some more light on his predecessor's character.

"And you advise me to clear Wyse out and let Greaves have Longmeadow Farm?"

"Certainly, your Grace—certainly," said Mr. Brinkman eagerly.

James Whitaker wondered how much Greaves was going to pay in the way of a reward to his steward if he procured Longmeadow Farm for him. He said: "Well, I must think about it—I must think about it. Don't take any further steps in the matter till I've considered it."

"Certainly not, your Grace—certainly not," said Mr. Brinkman quickly, but he looked pleased, as if he thought the matter settled as he wished it.

James Whitaker left him and walked down the corridor into the great kitchen at the end of it. His sudden appearance produced something of a flurry. The chef, who was sitting in an easy chair, apparently giving instructions to his staff, sprang to his feet and bowed gracefully, and said: *"Bon jour, Monsieur le Duc."* His assistants, a younger Frenchman and three buxom young women, gathered behind him, bowing or courtesying.

James Whitaker waved his hand graciously and said: "It's all right—it's all right. Don't disturb yourselves."

He looked slowly round the great, airy, clean kitchen, so spick and span, and bright with burnished copper vessels, turned and came out of it.

He walked back to his study and sat down to con-

sider this matter of business which needed dealing with. He felt that during the four or five days he proposed to stay at the Abbey he must by no means neglect the estate. Twelve hundred dollars a year was a considerable sum of money, a comfortable income, indeed. But his sympathy was with Wyse, the man who could not pay his rent by no fault of his own. The question whether it was worth a duke's while to incur odium for a matter of twelve hundred dollars a year suddenly presented itself as of the greatest importance. He could not think that it was worth a duke's while. Perhaps before deciding the matter, it would be well to see what kind of a man Wyse was. If he seemed the right kind of man he could signalize his stay at Lanchester Abbey by securing him in the possession of his farm.

He pressed the bell; and when Jenkinson came, he said: "I've got a motor-car, haven't I? I'm hanged if I can remember for certain!"

"Two, your Grace—two," said Jenkinson quickly.

"Well, I want one of them."

"Yes, your Grace. Will you have the touring car or the racing car, and shall Salmon or Hibbert drive you?"

"The touring car and Hibbert," said James Whitaker, after a moment's hesitation.

In about ten minutes a footman came to say that the car was at the door.

James Whitaker went down-stairs and found Jenkinson awaiting him with a motor-cap and a light motor-coat. He was careful to keep his arm stiff as

Jenkinson helped him into it, and put on the sling again. Then he went down the steps to the car and said: "Drive me to Longmeadow Farm," and stepped into the tonneau.

He had never been in a motor-car before; and he found it delightful. But before it reached the park gates it was rushing along at a speed which he found excessive and unpleasant.

When it came out of the park he shouted to Hibbert: "Go slower—a great deal slower!"

Hibbert turned his head and looked at him with an expression of such lively surprise as made it plain to James Whitaker that the late duke had been fond of scorching. Also he observed, as they ran through the village of Little Lanchester, that two or three women stood in the gardens or the doorways of their cottages, holding small children, hastily rescued from the roadway, with anxious troubled faces. He gathered from their looks that the late duke had been disliked by them. For the moment he thought that he might well set about changing that feeling; then he perceived that it could not be changed in the time he would be at the Abbey. The car was now going at a slower, entirely enjoyable pace, and presently it turned into the garden of an old, red-brick, gabled farmhouse, and stopped before the door.

He stepped out of the car, and said with some severity to Hibbert: "Don't scorch like that again."

Hibbert looked at him with an air of the liveliest surprise, flushed and stammered: "B-b-but your G-G-Grace always likes me to g-g-go fast."

James Whitaker saw that he had made a slip, and hesitated; then he growled: "Not just after I've been struck by lightning, and have my arm in a sling."

As he turned to the front door it opened; and a pretty girl (he saw at the first glance that she was a very pretty girl, with uncommonly fine dark eyes and an admirable complexion) made to come out, and then at the sight of him, started back, with a very odd expression. As he raised his cap, ungracefully enough, he looked into her eyes and filled with the amazing feeling that she knew his secret. He almost laughed out at the absurdity of the fancy.

She bowed slightly, seemed to recover herself, said over her shoulder: "Good-by, Cissie," came out of the house, passed him and walked down the drive.

He turned and looked after her: her slim graceful figure and light easy walk pleased his eye. At the gate she half turned and looked back at him, then went on quickly. He turned to find another girl standing in the doorway, looking at him with an air of surprise. She, too, was pretty; but her prettiness did not make the impression on him that that of the other girl had done.

"Miss Wyse, isn't it?" he said, making a shot at it. "May I see your father?"

"He's—he's somewhere in the d-d-dairies. If your G-Grace will come in, I'll send for him at once," she said, stammering a little and flushing faintly in her nervousness.

He came into a cool hall, fragrant with two bowls full of roses set on a high old oak chest; and she led

him to a prettily, simply furnished drawing-room, as fragrant with flowers as the hall, and left him. On the instant his dealer's eye began to appraise the furniture and ornaments in it.

He shook himself and went to the window. Before his eyes stretched the valley of the Wyper from another point of view, affording nearly as beautiful a prospect, though not so wide, as that from the terrace of the Abbey itself. Below him lay the village nestling among its trees.

He stood gazing at the prospect, admiring it with a grateful sense of possession till the door opened and Mr. Wyse came in. James Whitaker turned, looked at him keenly and liked his looks. He had a shrewd intelligent face, deeply tanned; and he looked to possess the energy and acumen to make a business pay. But also he looked worried, harassed, under the weather. That air of being under the weather, so like the air he had himself been wearing, won James Whitaker's heart; and he held out his hand. Wyse took it with an air of surprise, respectfully, but without warmth.

James Whitaker perceived that he had made a mistake in offering it: the late duke had not been used to shake hands with his tenants; but he said with an unruffled air: "Good morning, Mr. Wyse. I thought I should like to see you myself about this matter of your rent, and hear what you have to say about it."

Mr. Wyse's face brightened a little as he said: "I never expected to get the chance of talking it over with your Grace."

But he did not look very hopeful.

"Well, of course I don't know much about business," said James Whitaker. "What I want to know is, when do you think you would be able to pay it?"

"Well, it's like this, your Grace," said Wyse; and his face brightened yet more as a dim prospect of possible relief opened before him. "I could raise the money now, on my stock and the business, but at such a ruinous rate of interest that I should be crippled for years. What I was thinking was that if Mr. Brink—I mean your Grace—wouldn't give me time to pay these arrears, it would be better to cut my losses, sell the business and enough of my stock to pay my debts and make a fresh start. I should have enough stock left for a smaller farm on the other side of Lanchester; and I could build up another business in time."

"I see," said James Whitaker. "But if you didn't sell your business, how long would it take you to recover enough to pay off these arrears of rent?"

The farmer frowned thoughtfully, and said: "Well, if the business goes on as it's doing at present, your Grace, I could clear them off easily in a year. But supposing it went off a bit, I couldn't safely undertake to have them paid off in less than eighteen months."

"But suppose there's another dry summer?"

"There isn't, your Grace. We have had enough rain already to insure plenty of keep for the rest of the summer, and we're going to have more. Besides, I've made over a hundred tons of hay."

"I see—I see," said James Whitaker thoughtfully. "And of course, the Wyses have held the farm for the last two hundred years."

"Two hundred and thirty-three years, your Grace—two hundred and thirty-three," said the farmer with an air of pride.

"Ah, yes, I was forgetting that extra thirty-three years. Getting struck by that confounded stroke of lightning has muddled my head so. Well, Mr. Wyse, you needn't worry any more about these arrears; you can have the eighteen months to clear them off in. I'll send you a letter to that effect."

The farmer's face brightened till it fairly shone; and he cried: "I always said that your Grace wasn't as bad—" He pulled himself up, flushing and in a confusion. Then he added, stammering: "I—I mean that I'm very much obliged to your Grace—very much obliged indeed. I don't quite know how to tell your Grace how obliged I am."

"Not at all—not at all," said James Whitaker pleasantly; then, looking squarely and keenly into the farmer's eyes, he added: "By the way, do you happen to know how much Greaves was going to give Brinkman if he got your farm?"

Mr. Wyse looked at him in an astonishment indeed blank, and said rather faintly: "Well, your Grace, I did happen to hear that it was to be twelve hundred and fifty dollars."

"I thought you were the kind of man who would happen to hear," said James Whitaker; and he chuckled. Then he added: "Well, I'm very glad to have settled the matter in a satisfactory way. Good morning, Mr. Wyse."

The farmer shook hands with him, this time warmly

enough, and walked with him to the front door with a beaming face. James Whitaker bade Hibbert drive him home, and on reaching the Abbey betook himself straight to the office.

As he entered it Mr. Brinkman once more started up, rubbing his hands.

"I've just been to Longmeadow Farm and seen Wyse, and I've decided to give him eighteen months to clear off his arrears of rent. Just write a letter to say so, will you, and send it up for me to sign. Wyse seemed to think that a letter was the proper way to do it," said James Whitaker.

He did not know how much about business methods his predecessor had known, and he thought it well that Wyse should be responsible for this letter.

Mr. Brinkman's face fell in the most ludicrous fashion, and he glared at his employer in angry astonishment. His eyes flashed, and his thin lips bared his teeth in an angry snarl. Then he cried: "But, your Grace! It's—it's losing an opportunity you may not get again for years! A truly providential chance! A clear twelve hundred a year—and an improving property!"

James Whitaker drew himself up, scowling at him darkly, a very formidable figure, and growled: "Do as I tell you—will you?"

He turned on his heel, went out of the room and banged the door behind him. Mr. Brinkman dropped heavily on to his chair.

James Whitaker went back to the car and bade Hibbert drive him to Lanchester; and since Hibbert knew

now the pace at which he liked to be driven, he enjoyed the drive exceedingly. He was full of satisfaction with himself for having secured Wyse in the possession of Longmeadow Farm; he had a feeling, for which he could have found no reasonable grounds, that the action in some degree justified his assumption of the title; and it was a comforting feeling.

When he came into Lanchester he kept his eyes about him for people who greeted him, and gave them back the greeting they gave him: a man in a motor-car waved his hand, he waved his; several men touched their hats to him, he touched his. Only once did he have to raise his hat to a lady, who bowed to him from a pony-cart. He went into the post-office and bought a dollar and a half's worth of postage-stamps, changing one of his fifty-dollar notes. As he posted the letter to Millicent with the fifty dollars in notes in it, he was inclined to feel that he had earned them by his service to the reputation of the next Duke of Lanchester in the matter of Wyse.

Then, as he stepped back into the car, he said to Hibbert: "Don't go straight home, take as long a round as you can, so as to get me home in time for lunch."

"Yes, your Grace. Which way would your Grace like to go?"

"How do I know? Don't you know I've lost my memory?" growled James Whitaker.

Hibbert made a circuit of about twenty-five miles, driving him back to the Abbey, and James Whitaker lay back in a very pleasant laziness. He felt that he

had already done his day's work, and might now take his pleasure with an easy mind. But when he entered the great hall he received a shock, for Jenkinson said to him:

"If you please, your Grace, Lady Cubbington and Sir Richard Starton and Mr. and Mrs. Lowther have motored over to lunch."

James Whitaker hesitated for a moment, then he growled: "Oh, have they? Where are they?"

"Well, as your Grace hadn't come in, they thought they'd like to play a rubber before lunch, and they're playing in the blue drawing-room, because Sir Richard said it was the prettiest room in the house."

"Oh, are they?" growled James Whitaker.

CHAPTER V

AS Jenkinson slipped off James Whitaker's coat he told him that Doctor Arbuthnot had also called and that three newspaper reporters had come from London. Doctor Arbuthnot had seemed very pleased that he had not thought it worth while to stay at home to see him. The reporters had been told the story, shown the scorched coat, and gone away content.

James Whitaker went up-stairs with his heart beating quickly at the thought of the ordeal before him: so much would depend on how he came through it. These visitors had indeed taken him by surprise; it had been his firm intention to see none of the friends of the late duke during the four or five days of his stay at the Abbey; he had never foreseen an invasion of this kind. He washed away the dust of his drive slowly, letting his pulse resume its normal beat, regaining complete control of his nerves. When he found that he was quite master of himself, he came slowly down-stairs and went to the blue drawing-room.

His guests were playing at a table set in the big window at the end of the room. Absorbed in their game, they did not see him enter, and when he came up to the table only one of them, a slim man with indolent,

half-closed dark-brown eyes, dark-haired and rather pale, greeted him.

He drawled: "How are you, Lanchester?"

James Whitaker perceived that his fear of them had been excessive.

Their absorption gave him time to study them. One of the women was fair, golden-haired, blue-eyed, with a very clear pink-and-white skin and delicate features; the other was dark, coarse-skinned, thick-lipped and blunt-nosed. He made up his mind that she was Mrs. Lowther. It was the fair woman who attracted him, even doubtless as she had attracted his dead double: she must be Lady Cubbington. The other man was fair, ruddy and snub-nosed, a very common English type.

Then the hand came to an end, and they all greeted him together, noisily.

Then the dark slim man said: "What's this we hear about your having been struck by lightning and lost your memory, Lanchester?"

"It's true enough," growled James Whitaker.

"You've lost your memory?" cried the fair woman.

"And I've got a stiff arm and my throat muscles are so stiff it's a nuisance to speak," growled James Whitaker.

"Yes, Jenkinson told us you got struck about the chest. He was showing one of those newspaper fellows your burned coat when we came in," said the snub-nosed man.

"Surely you haven't forgotten Anne?" cried the dark woman, laughing.

James Whitaker saw the fair woman flush faintly, and he said quickly: "Of course I haven't. That isn't the kind of thing one forgets."

"Some people have more of that kind of thing to remember than others," said the dark man, and he laughed gently.

"Don't try to score off an invalid, Sir Richard. It isn't fair," said the dark woman.

"I wouldn't score off any invalid but Lanchester, Mrs. Lowther. Well or ill, there's no getting at him."

James Whitaker could now place every one: the snub-nosed man must be Mr. Lowther.

They rose, clamoring for lunch, and Lady Cubbington walked beside James Whitaker down the room and across the hall, plying him with questions: How did it feel to be struck by lightning? How did it feel to lose your memory? Was his arm very stiff? Was it very painful to speak? She hardly waited for an answer to a question; and he was obliged to her. Lunch was less of an ordeal than he had expected. Lady Cubbington and Mrs. Lowther talked all the time. Sir Richard Starton now and again threw in a few words which spurred them to fresh efforts; Mr. Lowther attended strictly to his lunch. James Whitaker was not once troubled by an awkward question; it was plain that, like himself, his double had not been garrulous; and all his share in the talk was now and again a growl or a vague murmur. His stiff arm excused any awkwardness in his table manners. But all the while he listened with all his ears, sifting the talk, storing up in his excellent memory every piece of in-

formation which might prove useful. The only thing that vexed him was that the effort prevented him from enjoying his lunch to the full.

After lunch, as soon as they had drunk their coffee, they went back to the drawing-room and again began their auction bridge. They invited him to play, offering to spare his arm by dealing for him; but he refused on the ground that his head seemed quite hazy about the game. However, he sat down beside the table and watched them play. But he kept his chief attention for Lady Cubbington; she attracted him. The game seemed to him obscure and difficult; and he resolved to read carefully a book on it before he attempted to play it.

When the rubber came to an end he growled in a cheerful tone: "I've forgotten every blessed thing about the game!"

The statement produced an outburst of exclamations of surprise and regret. Sir Richard Starton and Mrs. Lowther declared that such a fine player as he had been would soon pick it up again. This compliment to his skill at bridge was the first good he had heard about his predecessor.

Then they decided that they must begin at once to teach it to him, and as they played, they did so. Their explanations penetrated his mind none the more easily in that they all gave them at the same time. Still, the theory of the game did penetrate it.

He watched them for rather more than half an hour, then he arose, sauntered about the gardens, brilliant in the blazing sunshine, for a while, and then

went up to his study. On the bureau he found the letter he had ordered Mr. Brinkman to write to Wyse. He sat down, took the late duke's check out of his pocket, and practised writing the signature, "John Lanchester." At the end of ten minutes' work, he had covered two sheets of note-paper; then he signed the letter in a fashion which quite satisfied him. He struck a match and carefully burned in the empty grate the two sheets of note-paper he had covered with signatures. Then he rang for Jenkinson, and gave instructions that the letter was to be taken to Longmeadow Farm at once. It pleased him greatly to have settled the destiny of the Wyses; it was gratifying to his sense of power.

He was in no hurry to return to his busy guests; assuredly they were in no need of him. He unlocked the bottom drawer of the bureau, and took out the letters which Lady Cubbington had written to the dead duke. After her conversation at lunch he had no qualms about exploring the secrets of her heart: he felt that it was not the kind of heart to hold sacred secrets. Besides, had he had any qualms, the necessity of securing his safety would have made him disregard them. There were, as he had expected, no very intimate outpourings of the heart in the letters. The lady never grew fonder in her address to his predecessor than "Dear John." Indeed, it seemed to him that they had been engaged in no more than a warm flirtation. None the less, he was shocked to discover from the letters that Lord Cubbington was alive. He seemed, however, from what his wife said

about him, to be about seventy years of age and in a state of doddering idiocy. In the strict eyes of James Whitaker that did not palliate the painful fact of his existence. He was somewhat comforted, however, to find certain useful scraps of information which he stored carefully in his excellent memory.

He put away the letters and returned gloomily to his guests. Their interest in their game had not waned at all; and they took very little notice of him. Now and again the player who was dummy for the time being would talk to him, with half of his, or her, mind on the hand being played. James Whitaker was annoyed; he felt he was wasting one of his splendid afternoons (there would only be four or five of them) watching a tedious game, when he should have been enjoying his art treasures or his beautiful estate. It was of little comfort to him that, in the intervals of her strenuous play, Lady Cubbington looked at him with very kind eyes.

After a while he rose, sauntered across the terrace, down the steps and out of the gardens into the park. Here he had the English country in all its perfection; and it charmed him. Also, as he walked, his sense of proprietorship grew; and he admired his fine oaks, his graceful deer and the charming scenes presented by his winding, rippling trout-stream in a whole-hearted fashion. It was nearly five o'clock when he dragged himself away from this pleasure and returned to his guests. He found them finishing a rubber and Jenkinson and a footman setting out tea on a table near them. At the end of the rubber, they rose and

came to the table, relieved apparently to be able to stretch themselves after their hard work. As they drank their tea they discussed, with every show of interest, hands, calls, leaves and doubles.

Presently, however, Lady Cubbington began to talk to James Whitaker, telling him what she had been doing, saying and wearing during the last three days. After tea, still talking, she drew him insensibly to one of the long windows, through it and out into the garden. When they passed behind the screen of a shrubbery she drew nearer to him, almost nestling against him. He knew that he ought to fall into the part his predecessor had played; but the thought that she was a married woman hampered him. He knew that it was unwise, but he edged away from her unhappily.

She had almost edged him off the path when she stopped, frowning, and cried half angrily, half plaintively: "You *have* forgotten me!"

James Whitaker pulled himself together and growled:

"No, I haven't."

"Then why do you keep edging away from me? Why don't you kiss me?" cried Lady Cubbington, and her blue eyes flashed at him.

"I was just going to," growled James Whitaker firmly but quite untruthfully.

With that he put his left arm around her clumsily and administered a peck at her left cheek.

She gasped, shook herself free of his arm and cried: "What a kiss! I believe that beastly lightning *has* made you forget me!"

James Whitaker could see nothing wrong with the kiss; it was exactly the kind of kiss he was wont to administer to Millicent. But he said hastily:

"No, no: it isn't you I've forgotten; it's kissing. I —I seem to have lost the knack of it."

A sudden expression of suspicion filled Lady Cubbington's face, and she cried: "I know what it is! You've been seeing Emily again!"

"I haven't!" cried James Whitaker, with a warm convincing indignation, which came the easier to him since he was speaking the truth. He did not indeed know who Emily was.

"You'd better not!" she said with a slightly mollified air.

From the other side of the screen of shrubs came the voice of Sir Richard Starton calling her back to bridge.

"Kiss me properly—be quick!" she cried, and turned her charming face up to him.

It went sorely against the grain, but James Whitaker set his teeth, stooped and kissed her full on the lips. He felt that his safety demanded it. Also, except from the strictly moral point of view, he did not find it at all unpleasant.

She turned to go back to the house, saying: "If I find you don't really care for me, you needn't think I'll marry you when—when I'm a widow."

So that was the arrangement which had subsisted between her and his predecessor. James Whitaker followed her into the drawing-room with an easier heart: it would be easy to see less and less of her and

to let the arrangement lapse. Yet he could not help feeling annoyed by this necessity: he felt that he would have liked to grow more intimate with her. She had attracted his dead double; it was only natural that she should attract him. For the moment he had forgotten that the four or five days he proposed to remain at the Abbey were not long enough for him to grow intimate with any one. His guests returned to their game with unabated earnestness; and he left them to it. It was now cooler out-of-doors and even more enjoyable. He strolled up and down the terrace, smoking peacefully, enjoying the fresh air, the sunlight, the cigar, the singing of the birds and the beautiful scene which stretched before his eyes. Now and again he paused at the window of the blue drawing-room and feasted his eyes on Lady Cubbington's face. As he walked he considered his short interview with her. Undoubtedly it was a pity that he must not grow more intimate with her. Then suddenly he began to think of the pretty girl who had come out of Longmeadow Farm that morning, and of her strange glance which had given him the curious feeling that she knew his secret. She was undoubtedly far prettier, or rather far more beautiful, than Lady Cubbington. It was strange that though he had seen Lady Cubbington so lately, and for so much longer a time than he had seen the girl, the girl's face was far clearer to his mind than that of Lady Cubbington. He went back to the window and again examined it carefully.

At about half past six Sir Richard Starton called

to him that they were going home; and he went to them. He accompanied them to the front of the Abbey, and down the steps to the large motor-car which awaited them.

As she was stepping into the car Lady Cubbington said, over her shoulder: "Then we'll see you to-morrow night, Duke?"

"Where?" said James Whitaker.

"Why, at the Grange, of course!" she cried. "You're dining with us; and the Levingtons and Crawleighs are coming; and we're going to play baccarat after dinner."

"Yes, yes, of course. That beastly lightning had driven it clean out of my mind," said James Whitaker quickly.

He walked up the steps feeling content with himself. It was true that his guests had not given themselves many opportunities of discovering that he was not the duke; but they had not discovered it. That was the main thing. They were much less likely to discover it at a later meeting than at the first.

He went back to the blue drawing-room to examine a cabinet full of Chelsea figures. He had not dared to examine them while his guests were in the room; it might have been the very last thing in the world his predecessor would have done. He could now take his time over it and enjoy them at his ease. He had taken half a dozen of the figures out of the cabinet, and set them on the card-table in the full light of the window, and was admiring the beauty of the paste

and coloring, when Jenkinson entered, bearing a letter on a silver salver. James Whitaker took it, opened it and read:

"Miss Carton presents her compliments to the Duke of Lanchester, and begs to say that she wishes to see him on *a private matter of the most urgent importance.* She will be on the park bridge at nine o'clock."

The letter surprised him; it was even something of a shock. His first natural thought was that here was another lady with whom his apparently indefatigable predecessor had been on intimate terms. Of course it must be the daughter of the vicar; he remembered that his name was Carton.

Then of a sudden it flashed on him that Miss Carton was the girl who had come out of Longmeadow Farm that morning, and given him that curious glance. She *did* know his secret. He was sure of it. He swore softly under his breath.

Then he said to Jenkinson: "Who brought this note?"

"It was sent up from the vicarage, your Grace. And the vicar's gardener is waiting for an answer," said Jenkinson.

James Whitaker hesitated. Politeness demanded that he should write an answer to the note. Prudence forbade his doing anything of the kind. Doubtless the girl would be delighted to have a specimen of his handwriting.

Then he said to Jenkinson: "Say that I shall be charmed."

"Yes, your Grace," said Jenkinson; and he departed to take the message.

James Whitaker thrust his hands into his trousers pockets, and stared out of the window, frowning, for a couple of minutes. Then he returned to his consideration of the Chelsea figures. They occupied him till it was time to go to dress for dinner.

He did not hurry over his dinner and he drank nearly a bottle of champagne with it. He was careful to draw the greatest possible pleasure from them: they might so easily, if his suspicion were correct, be the last he would enjoy at the Abbey. He was resolved, however, to do his best to out-face the young lady: he was not going to lose the four or five days' pleasure he had promised himself without a fight. Then he thought that possibly he was quite wrong in his belief; for if the girl had really discovered his secret, why had she kept it to herself? He did not hurry over his coffee; and since it might easily be the last he would drink at the Abbey, he had another cup of it and two glasses of the '65 brandy. He did not think, however, that he would have to fly on the instant, whatever she might know, and therefore he did not change into a tweed suit. He would have time to do that later, if he must fly.

He walked down to the bridge in an expectancy almost pleasant. He was eager to meet the pretty creature. Yet, deep as was the impression her charming face had made on him, he could scarcely expect his interview with her to be pleasant, if his suspicions were correct. None the less, he crossed the park in

an increasing exaltation of spirit. He turned sharply to the left to the bridge; and as he stepped on to it, he saw indeed the pretty girl who had come out of Longmeadow Farm that morning, leaning upon the parapet.

At the sound of his footsteps she turned sharply toward him. He walked up to her briskly, and held out his left hand (his right hand was still in the sling) and said: "How do you do, Miss Carton?"

The girl started back with an air of surprise at his easy unembarrassed greeting.

"Ripping night: isn't it?" said James Whitaker in happy imitation of the manner and talk of his guests of the afternoon. "What was the urgent matter you wanted to see me about?"

The girl looked even more taken aback; but she said with some firmness: "You know quite well."

"Do I?" said James Whitaker, with a puzzled air. "I'm sorry; but getting struck by that lightning yesterday has muddled my head so that I've quite forgotten."

"That's just it—that being struck by lightning! I was on the top of Oak Tree Knoll during the thunder-storm yesterday," she cried, with a touch of triumph in her tone.

"Yes?" said James Whitaker, with a good air of bewilderment.

"Oh, it's no good your pretending you don't understand!" she cried scornfully. "I tell you I was under the oak . . . sheltering in the hollow part of it . . . on the opposite side to you . . .

I must have been there when you were struck. . . . Only I thought that the lightning had struck the tree. . . . Then when the storm was clearing away, I came out of it; and as I came round the trunk, I saw two men, one of them lying on the ground, and the other sitting up and rubbing his head. . . . It never occurred to me that you'd been struck by lightning . . . I thought you'd been fighting. . . . You looked as if you'd been fighting; and I was rather frightened. . . . You might have killed the other man; he was lying on his face. . . . So I kept behind the trunk, just peeping with one eye; and I watched to see what would happen. . . . I saw you lift up the other man; and his face was more dreadful than yours; and I was more frightened than ever. . . . And then I saw you look at the letters in his pocket, and take his cigarette-case out, and light a cigarette. . . . And then you walked about a bit . . . and you were frowning and scowling, and looking horrible. . . . I didn't dare to come out. And then you picked him up, and started to carry him into the bushes. . . . And when you picked him up I recognized the duke. . . . Not by his face, but by his clothes. . . . I had seen him wearing them when he passed the vicarage after lunch. . . . And you carried him into the bushes, and I didn't know what to do. . . . I thought you might come back at any moment; and if you saw me and knew that I had seen you kill the duke, you would probably kill me as well—or try to. . . . Even

then it didn't occur to me that you'd been struck by lightning. . . . And I waited and waited. . . . There's only that one path down from the knoll to the village. . . . And then you did come back, carrying the duke again. . . . And I saw you'd changed clothes with him; and it flashed on me that you were going to pretend to be the duke. . . . Then you went away; and this time I knew you'd gone for good. . . . Then I came out from behind the oak; and when I saw the duke's face close to, so scorched and twisted, I saw that he'd been struck by lightning." She stopped, shuddering, and added: "Oh, it was dreadful."

At first James Whitaker was exceedingly annoyed to find that his fancy about the girl had not been absurd. But presently his annoyance was lost in the pleasure of watching the quick-changing expressions come and go in her animated face, so clear in the moonlight, and of hearing her delightful voice. Then his chief feeling became a strong curiosity to know why she had not gone straight to the police.

"Why didn't you go and tell people this extraordinary story at once?" he said quickly, and in a tone of genuine curiosity, when she came to the end of her tale.

She knitted her brow, and said more slowly: "Well, I did start off intending to tell Murgatroyd—he's our policeman here, you know. But then it occurred to me that it would be so interesting to see what you'd do. And it was so exciting to be the only person to know about it all. There didn't seem any hurry to

tell people. I could always tell when I wanted to. You don't know how dull it is in Little Lanchester. And it was so amusing and exciting."

"That wasn't any excuse for not going straight to the police," said James Whitaker in a tone of cold disapproval.

"I like you saying that!" cried Miss Carton, with some heat. "Besides, I tell you I didn't want to go to them. I wanted to see what you'd do. I could always go to the police when I wanted to. I can now."

James Whitaker laughed gently and said: "And do you think they'd believe your extraordinary story? You knew the duke. You can see for yourself that I am the duke."

"Oh, the likeness is wonderful," she said frankly. "When you came out of those bushes carrying him, I thought you were the duke, that for some reason or other you'd changed clothes with the man and just changed back again."

"Well, why not?" he said quickly.

She shook her head: "Oh, no," she said with conviction. "When Doctor Arbuthnot told us that you'd lost your memory, it settled it. I was quite sure before that you weren't the duke; but that settled it. And of course when you agreed to let Mr. Wyse stop on at Longmeadow Farm, that settled it absolutely: the duke would never have done anything half so decent."

"You don't know how being struck by lightning changes one's character," said James Whitaker quickly.

"It's no good your talking like that; what the lightning changed was the duke's face," she said firmly.

"But it *hasn't* changed my face. You can see for yourself," said James Whitaker.

"It's no good your talking like that! I know you're not the duke!" she cried.

James Whitaker gazed at her face thoughtfully, with a great deal of pleasure.

"Well, when are you going to tell your extraordinary story to the police?" he said.

She knitted her brow again, gazing at him earnestly, then she said: "I've changed my mind about that."

"You have?" he said quickly.

"Yes, your letting Mr. Wyse stop on at Longmeadow (the Wyses are our oldest friends) made a lot of difference. If you are going to do things like that, you'll be a much better duke than the duke's brother, who is the heir. He is a perfectly hateful person—worse than his brother." Even in the paling moonlight he saw that her face darkened in an angry flush; and she frowned darkly. "So I've made up my mind not to tell the police about it."

"You have?" he said quickly.

She seemed to hesitate; and then she said in a small uncomfortable voice: "But there's a condition."

"A condition? What condition?"

"On the c-c-condition t-t-that I'm—I'm a d-d-duchess! You must marry me!" she stammered quickly.

"Marry you!" cried James Whitaker, in a tone of the blankest astonishment.

"Yes," she said in a more assured voice. "I know it sounds odd, but you don't know what a hateful place Little Lanchester is. I'm not going to be tied

to it all my life. I won't be. I want to go about the world, to travel and see things—to meet nice people. But how am I to do it? I'm not clever enough to go on the stage, which is one way. And I can't write, because I've tried. Of course, I could be a companion to a lady, but what's the good of that? I shouldn't enjoy things that way. But your coming like this, taking the duke's place—why, it seems almost providential!"

It seemed to James Whitaker that people at Little Lanchester had strange ideas about what was providential. But he saw that it was still possible to get his four or five days' uninterrupted pleasure at the Abbey: he had only to temporize.

"Well, you can't expect me to accept such a strange proposal at a moment's notice," he said.

"I'm not proposing!" she cried with some heat. "I'm telling you what you've got to do."

"Of course—of course," said James Whitaker in a soothing tone. "But the matter requires careful consideration all the same. Suppose after we were married we found we didn't suit each other? We should only be unhappy."

"Oh, I didn't mean being married seriously. What I meant was just being married in name, so to speak—like they do in novels. I could be the duchess that way."

It may have been the second glass of the '65 brandy on the top of the bottle of champagne, or it may have been her enchanting face in the moonlight, but for the moment James Whitaker quite forgot that he was

already provided with a wife, and his soul rose in fierce revolt against the proposal.

"I would never agree to a loveless marriage! Never!" he cried sternly.

"But love has nothing to do with it! There's no need of anything of the kind. It's just an arrangement," she protested.

"I would never agree to it—never," said James Whitaker with unabated firmness. "You can go to the police now—this very night, and tell them your story for what it is worth!"

"But it's absurd!" she cried. "How am I to fall in love with you? Why, I don't even know who you are."

"Well, for the purpose of being fallen in love with, I'm the Duke of Lanchester," said James Whitaker firmly.

"But you don't know how horrid the duke was," she said.

"And you don't know how different he is," said James Whitaker. "But it's merely waste of time talking about it. I will not consent to a loveless marriage."

He was pleased with his firmness in the matter; he felt that he was defending a great principle; and a warm glow of virtue suffused him very pleasantly.

She looked at him with an air of the most acute perplexity and annoyance, and cried: "What's the use of talking like that? People can't fall in love just because it's necessary!"

A happy thought flashed into the mind of James Whitaker: it was plain that he must temporize to keep the girl silent during the four or five days he was staying at the Abbey, but why should he not, by that very process of temporizing, render those four or five days more pleasant? Of course he was a married man, but the situation was forced on him. He said gravely:

"My dear Elizabeth, a great deal can be done by trying."

"How dare you call me Elizabeth!" she cried angrily.

"People—people who are engaged to be married call each other by their Christian names," said James Whitaker with cold firmness.

"I believe you are the duke, after all: you're so horrid!"

"I told you I was the duke," said James Whitaker.

"You know you're not the duke," she said indignantly.

James Whitaker looked at her sternly and said again gravely: "We're getting away from the point. We're discussing our being married, and we've reached the conclusion that a loveless marriage is out of the question."

"*I* haven't!" she cried.

"But *I* have," said James Whitaker, with a gentle wave of his hand. "And the question now is, how are we going to make marriage possible. You're really keen on being a duchess?"

She hesitated, staring at him with the most keenly

perplexed eyes; then she cried: "I don't know—you're—you're so different. But—but—I do. I do want to be a duchess!"

"Well, then we have to devote our time to acquiring sufficient affection for each other to render the marriage possible," he said earnestly, almost solemnly. "We ought at any rate to give ourselves the chance. It's all a matter of seeing each other, and giving ourselves a chance to like each other, you know."

She gazed at him, frowning thoughtfully; then she said: "It's all very well, but I don't know who you are. I haven't the slightest idea. You might be anybody."

"Well, if you mean to be the Duchess of Lanchester the sooner you make up your mind that I'm the Duke of Lanchester the better. And if you notice anything in me that doesn't fit in with that position, you can point it out to me, and I'll try to mend it. Come, that's a fair offer."

"It wasn't what I meant at all," she said in a very doubtful voice. "I didn't mean to have anything of this kind in it. But perhaps there wouldn't be any harm in trying—though I don't think there's the slightest chance of my ever coming to care for you."

"You can't tell till you've tried. At any rate, it's the sensible thing to do. But if you don't care to try it, you can go straight to the police and tell them that I'm not the Duke of Lanchester."

"No; I don't want to do that—not now, anyway," she said slowly. "And after all, though it's quite impossible for me to come to like you really (you have

such a hard and savage face), there's no harm in trying it."

"That's all right," said James Whitaker cheerfully. "Let's go for a stroll down the river bank."

She hesitated; then she fell into step with him, and they started. He was pleased with the result of the negotiations: he felt that, as far as she was concerned, he was safe for the next four or five days.

She was much less pleased with the result. She had expected him to accept her condition; but she was accepting his.

CHAPTER VI

IT was one thing to be walking with a charming and attractive girl, and another to talk to her. James Whitaker would have liked to point out to her that she had been, and was, trying to blackmail him, but it seemed unlikely to make for pleasantness. He knew but little about women, but he had learned from his association with Millicent that a woman must always be in the right. He cudgeled his brains for a better opening, but could find none. His failure annoyed him, for he felt that his predecessor, judging from the drawerful of letters in his study, could never have been at a loss for a subject of conversation with a woman. Miss Carton was looking straight before her, her brow knitted in a thoughtful frown. She seemed to have no desire at the moment to talk, and looked quite unlikely to help him.

At last he said: "Do you mind my smoking?"

"No," she said.

He lighted a cigar, and no longer felt any imperative need to talk to her. It was enough to look at her face in the moonlight and enjoy the cigar. He was quite sure that he had never seen such a beautiful face; her clearly, delicately cut profile with the straight nose, not too long, and the rather full lips, was as charming as her full face.

Her face, or the cigar, stimulated him, for presently he said: "This is a glorious night, and a glorious place to be in."

"It is a pretty place," she said somewhat grudgingly.

"You speak as if you thought it wasn't," said James Whitaker.

"I've grown tired of it. You see I've lived here all my life. It's beautiful enough in summer, but in winter it's dreadful. There's no one to talk to, and no books to read, or anything."

"But I thought you were a friend of Miss Wyse?"

"Yes; there are just two of us; there's not another soul."

James Whitaker pondered the statement, then he said:

"Hasn't she got any brothers?"

"No, she hasn't. And if she had, they wouldn't be any use. They'd always be hard at work on the farm. It would be all right if there were any tennis or hockey, like there are in other places; but there isn't, and the consequence is I'm a perfect duffer at both."

Her impatient eyes flashed and sparkled on him as she uttered her complaint.

"It is very hard lines being shut into a narrow groove," said James Whitaker with real fellow feeling.

"Oh, it is!" she cried.

He looked at her earnestly and said: "But I should have thought it impossible for it to happen to you."

"Why not?"

"You're so extraordinarily good-looking."

She stopped short and faced him, frowning. "You've no business to talk to me like that!" she said sharply.

"Well, I think if you want to get to know a wom—any one, it's best to speak out exactly what you think. But of course I don't know much about that kind of thing."

"There! Now you *have* admitted that you're not the duke! He had lots of experience. Everybody said so," she cried in a tone of triumph.

James Whitaker saw that he had made a slip; but in his pleasant condition of stimulated well-being, though his invention was dull, his reason was working with uncommon smoothness.

"Ah, of course people say that," he said carelessly. "But they don't know the facts of the case. As a matter of fact, I'm not any good at love-making—as you'll find out."

She considered his face curiously for a few seconds, then she said: "I suppose you mean they run after you because you're duke."

"I never said they did run after me! I shouldn't think of saying such a thing!" cried James Whitaker indignantly.

"You implied it. And anyway, that must be it," she said in a tone of conviction.

"Why must it be it?" said James Whitaker, even more indignantly, for it was a somewhat ruffling statement.

"Well—you're—you're not good-looking, are you?" she said in a somewhat apologetic tone.

"Good-looking! What should I be good-looking *for?*" cried James Whitaker in a tone of deep disgust.

"Oh, well, everybody *likes* to be good-looking," she said mildly.

"Men don't bother about that kind of thing," he said firmly. "Why should they? It's so unnecessary to be an Apollo Belvedere."

"There! That's the kind of thing that annoys me so," she said, once more complaining. "You know what you mean when you talk of the Apollo Belvedere. But I've never seen it, and I never shall."

"No more—" said James Whitaker; and he stopped short.

He had been on the point of saying "No more have I"; but the thought that the duke might very well have seen it checked him.

He changed the subject abruptly, saying: "My looks can't matter at all. Let's talk about something more interesting. Look at the moonlight on the stream there. I can't understand your getting tired of a beautiful place like this."

"I'm not tired of it—not exactly—in the summer, that is," she said slowly. "But I want to see the other places too—London—I want to stay there—a long time—with lots of money to go everywhere and see everything. The only place I ever go to is to Shap, in Westmoreland—where my aunts live—and it's worse than this."

"Oh, if you *want* to live in town!" he said contemptuously, thinking of Hammersmith.

"But I don't! I like the country! But I don't want to be buried in it all my life!" she cried with some heat.

She went on to enlarge upon the emptiness of her life (at the assembly rooms at Lanchester); how she had never been to a dance; how she had never met a single interesting person, not an actor, or a writer, or an explorer, or a great soldier, or a leading politician.

James Whitaker was very sympathetic with her. Indeed, he felt very sympathetic with her; as she talked he realized more clearly than ever how his own life had been cramped.

He was indeed enjoying himself greatly. The charm of the beautiful moonlit night in the soothing and fragrant air, so refreshing to his urban spirit, was trebled for him by her charming face, her delightful, liquid voice, and her beautiful, appealing eyes. He was indeed so sympathetic to her appeal that she felt that she was really growing acquainted with him; and she found the process unexpectedly pleasant. She had never before enjoyed the sympathy of an intelligent man, and she found it indeed comforting and stimulating. Indeed, the time passed so quickly that she was amazed to hear the clock strike eleven.

"Good gracious!" she cried. "My father will be thinking that something dreadful has happened to me! I shall have to *run* home."

"What could happen to you here?" said James Whitaker.

"Nothing. That's why I'm so sick of the place," she said quickly.

Fortunately they had been wandering in a circle, and were very near the bridge from which they had started, the nearest point of the park to the village. He went over it with her and along the bank of the stream to the end of the home wood.

It seemed to him not only needful to secure her silence, but also entirely desirable that he should enjoy more of her society; and he proposed that she should meet him at the bridge at eleven the next morning.

"Oh, I couldn't!" she said in a hesitating tone. "It wouldn't do at all. Think how people would talk if they knew!"

"That's all very well, but we've got to talk. There are ever so many things we've got to discuss. We can't be married without doing it. Besides, how are we to give ourselves any chance of being married at all unless we see plenty of each other?"

"There wouldn't be any need for that—it wouldn't matter at all—if you'd only be married the way I want," she said in a somewhat aggrieved tone.

"But I won't—I shouldn't dream of it! No loveless marriages for me, thank you," he said firmly. "And if we're really going to try to work it, what does it matter what people say? You'll really *have* to come."

They had come to the gate opening from the home wood into the lane to the village, and she stood still, hesitating. She wanted to come; their talk had been pleasant; she had never before met any one to whom

she could unburden herself so freely. At last she said:

"Very well, I'll come—just for once."

"Good," he said, and made to follow her through the gate.

"No, you mustn't come any farther. It wouldn't be safe," she said.

They shook hands with considerable warmth, seeing that they were but two hours acquainted; and he watched her until she disappeared round a corner of the lane.

She reached home not ill satisfied by the meeting. She was not getting her way wholly, but it was not improbable that she would get what she chiefly wanted. But James Whitaker had proved far more satisfactory than she had expected. She had been disposed, whether he were the duke or merely an impersonator of the duke, to regard him as a villain, but she had found him a quiet sympathetic person, even high principled in the matter of loveless marriages. She had even modified her belief in his ugliness. She had always regarded the Duke of Lanchester as a very ugly man; the rugged face of his double had lost for her much of its ugliness. Certainly, when you saw them close, he had beautiful eyes.

She wished she were quite sure whether he were the duke or some one impersonating the duke. Of course, if he were the duke, he must just be playing with her. . . . But no: he certainly was not playing with her. . . . Her instinct told her that.

James Whitaker walked back to the Abbey in fine elation. He had not spent so pleasant an evening in years. It was, of course, awkward that his secret was known to an inexperienced girl; she might carelessly let it slip out. But he had only to keep her silent for a fortnight or three weeks, and she would be unable to persuade any one of the truth of her story. The truth, that she had kept silent with the intention of marrying him, would be quite incredible to the inhabitants of Little Lanchester.

He lay awake for a while thinking of her. He had a rare power of visualization, and he called up her charming image and kept it before his mind with the greatest pleasure. Once or twice a doubt assailed him whether a man of his domesticated nature ought to find such a pleasure in doing this.

He awoke pleasantly next morning to the prospect of a pleasant idle day. There would be nothing to do but enjoy himself till the evening, when he was to dine and play baccarat at the Grange. He might, or might not play it. He might find it advisable to join in it in order to play his part of duke properly. It was a rather tiresome affair; it would be far more pleasant to stroll by the stream in the park with Elizabeth. But he was curious to see more of these great folk.

He enjoyed his breakfast thoroughly, and the fact that he was going to spend the morning with Elizabeth Carton increased his enjoyment of it. It is true that his conscience reminded him twice that a married man had no right to spend a pleasant morning

with a pretty girl in a park; but he was very short with it, assuring himself that necessity knows no law, and that, above all things, she must be kept silent. With equal firmness he repressed his tendency to congratulate himself on his compulsion.

He read in two newspapers, with very little interest, the accounts of his being struck by lightning.

He walked down to the bridge in some doubt, painful doubt, whether after all Miss Carton would come to meet him; and in some doubt herself, she kept him waiting ten minutes. But at ten minutes past eleven she came, looking very fresh and delightful and charming in a light gray summer frock, which gave her beautiful color its full value.

They did not walk very far, for she had no desire whatever to be seen in the compromising company of the duke. About fifty yards down the stream she turned aside into a little nook, embowered in hazel-bushes, in its bank, and sat down. James Whitaker found it very pleasant to lie back against the bank, smoking an excellent cigar, and watch her changing face and listen to her delightful voice. He had little desire to talk, and there was little need for him to do so, since the happy subject on which she was enlarging was what she would do when she was duchess. It seemed as if, in the course of the night, the difficulty created by his objection to a loveless marriage had been removed, for she talked of the things she proposed to do almost as if it were already settled that she would be in the position to do them.

He helped her now and again with a suggestion.

Only once during the morning did he strike a jarring note; and she was really to blame for it, since she suggested once more that he was not the duke.

"Well," he said thoughtfully, "if I were the impersonator you say I am, we should certainly be well-matched, shouldn't we? An impersonator and a blackmailer."

"What do you mean?" she cried; and her eyes flashed. "How dare you say such a thing?"

He looked at her in genuine astonishment, and said: "But of course you're a blackmailer. You're blackmailing me into marrying you."

"It isn't true!" she cried with the liveliest indignation. "Nothing would induce me to marry you, if I didn't want to be duchess!"

"Yes, but that's just it!" he cried. "You tried to obtain the position and the income of a duchess by threatening me; and that is blackmailing."

"I think it's perfectly detestable of you to say such a thing!" she cried, yet more indignantly. "You know I can't go on being buried alive in this horrid little village. Besides, you wouldn't agree to a loveless marriage—you said you wouldn't—and if we did—I mean, if it isn't a loveless marriage—I'm not forcing you to marry me."

She stopped short with a fine flush on her face.

"No," he said, smiling at her amiably. "But I tell you what you are doing; you're forcing me to fall in love with you."

"I'm not!" she cried. "You insisted on doing it yourself—at least, you insisted on trying."

"And I'm inclined to think that I shall succeed," he said cheerfully.

"Well, you needn't think that I shall fall—I mean —I mean it will be quite a one-sided affair if you go on saying detestable things like that!"

"Like what?"

"About blackmailing."

"Oh, it only just occurred to me. It isn't worth bothering about," he said in a tone of indifference.

"But you've no business to say such things," she said in a less violent tone.

"Perhaps I oughtn't," he said carelessly. "Well, we won't discuss it any more."

They resumed the more peaceful discussion of what she would do when she was duchess. Either it was the stimulation of the country air, or it was the stimulation of her beauty, but suddenly he found himself assuring her with the most impressive emphasis that she would be the most charming duchess in England. He felt at once that it was no business of a married man to be offering these tributes to a girl's beauty, but it seemed very natural. He excused himself on the ground that it was necessary to keep her in good temper, and that after all it did not really matter, since he would only be seeing her for another three or four days.

When she had come to the end of the pleasant things she was going to do when she was a duchess, she turned her talk to the improvements she was going to make on the estate, and presently she was reproaching him severely for the cramped and unsanitary cot-

tages in which the laborers who worked on the home farm lived. As the parson's daughter she had had full opportunity of learning their condition.

Her revelations surprised James Whitaker, but he was careful to conceal that surprise. He rather tried to win more favor by professing his readiness to accept her suggestions of reform, and had presently pledged himself to an exhaustive scheme of housing and sanitation. She was very pleased with his readiness, and with his assurance that he would set Mr. Brinkman to work on the scheme that very afternoon. She wrote down for him the names of the three hamlets, besides Little Lanchester itself, which needed rebuilding—Wodden, Chigleigh and Gant.

He thanked her and put the piece of paper with their names on it into his pocket.

Then she said: "I wonder when they're going to find the duke's body."

"Whose body?" said James Whitaker with well-feigned surprise.

"It's dreadful to think of its lying there," she said, taking no notice of his question. "But I don't know what to do about it."

"It's a little late for you to do anything. They'll find it sooner or later," he said somewhat callously.

"Oh, you are unfeeling," she said reproachfully.

"No, I'm not really," he said. "But it can't make any real difference to a dead man whether he's in a wood or in his grave."

"But why don't you tell them about it?" she said.

"You forget that my head's all muddled about the

matter. I can't take them to this dead man you tell me about. I don't know the way," he said, with a good show if impatience.

"I don't quite know what's to be done," she said, knitting her brow.

"It's best to leave it alone, I should think. They're bound to find him in a day or two," he said quite carelessly.

She was silent for a minute, pondering; then she said: "Well, it's just as well I saw the duke's walking-stick and brought it away. It was lying a few yards from his body."

James Whitaker looked at her somewhat blankly and thought it was indeed just as well, but he did not say so. He said: "My walking-stick, you mean."

"No; I don't," she said firmly. "You can't even tell me what it's like."

It was a shrewd thrust, but he was not unready; he said: "I could if I could remember what stick I was carrying. But I can only remember those I saw in the stand this morning."

She looked at him with a very doubtful, wondering air.

Then she rose and said that she must be going. He rose with considerable reluctance, and they took their way back to the bridge. When they came to it they stopped, and he said:

"About this afternoon: how would it be if you were to come and spend it with me at the Abbey? There are lots of beautiful things at the Abbey for you to see. Besides, there's the place itself."

"Think how people would talk," she said; but her face had brightened at the suggestion.

"I don't see how that's to be helped," he said eagerly. "We certainly can't grow better acquainted without people seeing us together; and we've evidently got to get better acquainted."

"Oh, well; if you look at it like that, I suppose we must chance their talking," she said gravely.

"All the same there's no need for any one to know how long you're at the Abbey," he said quickly. "We'll meet here and go through the shrubberies and into the blue drawing-room. None of the servants ever seem to be in the most interesting part of the house. You might come and spend a couple of hours and go away without being seen by one of them, with a little luck. But, of course, you will have tea with me, and stay for a while after it."

"Oh, I should like to!" she said, and her eyes shone. Then she added doubtfully: "But I'm not at all sure that I ought to."

"Well, we'll try it and see what happens," he said cheerfully. "I'll meet you here at three."

CHAPTER VII

AFTER lunch James Whitaker betook himself at once to the steward's office, and as he entered it Mr. Brinkman rose, smiling a broad welcome, rubbing his hands together, and greeted him in an unpleasant, obsequious tone.

James Whitaker greeted him in the husky growl he was affecting, and said: "I've decided to rebuild Little Lanchester, Wodden, Chigleigh and Gant, and fit them out with the latest things in the way of drains. I'm going to house all the laborers on the estate properly."

"What?" cried Mr. Brinkman. The smile died on his face, and it filled with amazement and horror. "Your Grace is going to pamper the laborers?"

"No, I'm only going to house them like human beings," growled James Whitaker.

"But the county, your Grace—the county won't stand it. You couldn't do anything more certain to destroy your influence and make you thoroughly unpopular. It will offend all your friends and your tenants and your friends' tenants. It will offend everybody."

"They can go to the devil," said James Whitaker carelessly.

"Yes, of course your Grace says that. Your Grace always says that. But this is such a very different thing from anything else you've ever done; and people won't stand it. I assure your Grace they won't," pleaded Mr. Brinkman in harrowed tones.

"If they don't like it, they can lump it," growled James Whitaker.

It was something of a satisfaction to him to know that his benefactions would be a source of annoyance to his successor. He envied and disliked his successor, even without knowing who he might be. It was a pleasure to make his path rough for him.

"B-b-but where's the money to come from?" said Mr. Brinkman.

"Out of the rents of course," said James Whitaker readily.

"But your Grace is spending every penny of your income from this estate as it is," cried Mr. Brinkman. "Has your Grace any idea how much it will cost to rebuild all these villages?"

"Not the slightest," said James Whitaker in a tone that conveyed exactly the indifference he felt.

The expression of horror deepened on Mr. Brinkman's face. It shone with the sweat of anguish. His lips moved as if he were calculating.

"Not a penny less than a million one hundred thousand dollars, more than two years' income from the Abbey estate," he moaned.

"I've got other estates," said James Whitaker at a venture. "I can live on the income from them."

"But you encumber this estate for years, your Grace.

The Abbey *has* to be kept up out of the rents from it," wailed Mr. Brinkman. "It will take five years to pay for these improvements if your Grace doesn't touch a penny of the rents for your personal expenses."

"That's all right. Get the best architect from Lanchester here at ten o'clock to-morrow to go round the villages with me," said James Whitaker.

"Very well, your Grace—very well. But you can't improve the condition of these people. It's been tried; and it can't be done. It's been proved again and again. It's a waste of money—such a dreadful waste of money!" moaned Mr. Brinkman.

"And write at once to a good firm of builders so that they can let me have their estimates as soon as the architect's plans are ready. I want the thing properly under way in three days from now."

"In three days! A scheme like this! But it's impossible, your Grace! Impossible!" Mr. Brinkman almost howled.

James Whitaker scowled blackly at him, and growled savagely: "You're here to see that it's done. Do it!"

Mr. Brinkman gasped: "I don't know what's come to your Grace," he wailed. "You used to agree that it was nonsense to try to do anything for the agricultural laborer—just silly Radical talk."

"I've changed my mind," growled James Whitaker.

"It's a change indeed. Your Grace is a changed man—another person altogether—since that lightning-stroke," wailed Mr. Brinkman.

"You get that architect and builders," growled James

Whitaker, turning on his heel; and he went out of the room and shut the door firmly behind him.

The thought that he was pledging his detested successor to improvements that would probably be exceedingly distasteful to him made him smile most unamiably. He would have the contracts signed before he retired from the Abbey. Then the thought of his successor's annoyance inspired into him a desire to know who that successor might be; and he went into the library. On the desk at which the late duke's secretaries had been wont to work stood a Debrett's *Peerage;* its red and gold had caught his eye during his earlier visit of exploration. He sat down at the desk, opened the book and learned in half a minute that the only near kin the duke had had was one brother, Lord Edward Beddard. The next nearest was a female second cousin. James Whitaker perceived that the Lanchester family must be worn out and coming to its end. It seemed to him a pity; some effort should be made to save it. What was plainly needed was fresh blood—quite fresh blood, red and not blue.

He wondered what Lord Edward Beddard was like: whether he would be a good duke. On the shelves beside him were a dozen letter-files; and he took it that they contained letters less private than those in the bureau in his smoking-room. He took from the shelf the letter-file for the current year, and sure enough in the B compartment he found two letters from Lord Edward Beddard. One of them was a pressing re-

quest to the duke for a loan, the other a grudging letter of thanks for a smaller loan than that requested. James Whitaker took out the file for the previous year, and found in it two letters of the same tenor; the spelling of all four of them showed the same weaknesses, Lord Edward Beddard did not seem at all a promising successor.

In the same compartment he found a letter relating to the purchase of a race-horse named Bustard, and to his surprise learned from it that he was the owner of a racing-stable at Newmarket. This was the most annoying discovery he had yet made at the Abbey. He hated the turf; his loathing of it was one of the strongest of his feelings. He considered that he owed to it his crippled dismal life. Then and there he made up his mind to remain Duke of Lanchester till that racing-stable was broken up and scattered to the four quarters of the heavens.

Then a happy thought came to him; and he hurried back to Mr. Brinkman's office in a pleasant glow.

He found his steward writing to the Lanchester architect with an air of funereal gloom. The slight distortion of feature with which he greeted the re-entry of his employer was hardly as much as a wan smile.

"I've got it, Brinkman," growled James Whitaker. "I'm going to sell my racing-stable and pay for the improvements with that."

Mr. Brinkman sank back in his chair; and his face filled with a deeper amazement than before; then slowly he began to smile. He had no interest in the

racing-stable. This way of paying for the improvements in the villages would not affect him at all; the income from the estate would pass through his hands into the usual channels.

"This is a change," he said solemnly. "The Dukes of Lanchester have kept race-horses since the reign of George II. They must have spent—well over a million—a million of money—to say nothing of their losses betting—on racing."

"Thrown away," growled James Whitaker.

"Yes—well, your Grace, I'm afraid we must admit they haven't received much benefit from it—very little in fact," said Mr. Brinkman unctuously.

"Anyhow, it's going to stop," growled James Whitaker. "Get on to selling it at once."

"But this will be a longer business than starting the improvements in the villages; and it's no good your Grace's being impatient. It isn't really," protested Mr. Brinkman.

James Whitaker scowled at him darkly: "If you don't put your back into it and hustle people along, I'll get some one who will," he said in a very ugly tone.

He flung out of the office and left Mr. Brinkman shivering. He had always been in considerable dread of the duke, even when he had been making the fullest use of his ignorance of business and carelessness about the estate to manage it in his own fashion. But it seemed to him that to-day the duke had begun to display a more savage ferocity than ever. It must of course be the effect of the lightning-stroke; and he

wondered whether it had affected his employer's mind. It seemed exceedingly probable: this strange sudden whim to sell his racing-stable and this stranger and no less sudden whim to improve the condition of the laborers on the estate indeed savored of insanity. He shivered again: the duke sane had been formidable enough; the duke mad would hardly bear thinking of.

It was certainly best to humor him: he *would* hustle the architect and builders. After all, the duke's madness, if it were madness, might not prove an unmixed evil: it might afford openings.

James Whitaker lost his formidable air almost as he left the office; and he took his way to the bridge to meet Miss Elizabeth Carton, in a warm glow of self-approbation. He had not only set about two good works in rebuilding the villages and selling the racing-stable, but he had selected two good works which he felt would be obnoxious indeed to Lord Edward Beddard. Already he had come to loathe Lord Edward Beddard; words could not express his contempt for his spelling.

Miss Carton kept him waiting ten minutes; but he did not chafe at her tardiness. He was enjoying his expectation of seeing her and the exquisite flavor of his cigar. He had a strong enjoyable feeling that he had earned that cigar and all the good things he was enjoying at Lanchester Abbey; he had done a good day's work for future Dukes of Lanchester.

Then Miss Carton came. Plainly she had not hurried; she looked quite cool. There was no need for him to take her up the steps of the terrace and across

it in full view of the windows. They walked along the wooded bank of the stream to a side gate in the garden, and along a little path which wound upward through the shrubberies, along the ends of the terraces, and so on to the little lawn before the blue drawing-room. They entered it unseen.

He set about showing her the Abbey in the same cautious fashion; once they played veritable hide-and-seek with Jenkinson and a footman, and escaped unseen. The partnership in this small concealment increased their intimacy out of all proportion to its importance. James Whitaker was somewhat disappointed by her manifest lack of capacity to appreciate the beauty of the treasures he showed her; and it grieved him that he could not possibly develop and train her taste in the few days he had at his disposal. Indeed, she annoyed him more than once by calling a beautiful thing "pretty" or, worse still, "sweet."

His expert knowledge of the Abbey treasures, of the china and the pictures, surprised her: it indeed shook her belief that he was not the duke; and she kept looking at him with puzzled wondering eyes. The fact that now and again he told her the cash value of this or that treasure threw no light on him for her.

In the library she was more at home, since her father had a very fair library, and she had, out of mere boredom, read some serious books which do not come the way of the bulk of girls. Indeed, he found her far better read in history than himself. None the less, the books she borrowed were two novels fresh from Mudie's.

When it was time for tea, they stole back to the blue drawing-room, out of it into the shrubberies, round to the central steps of the terrace, up them, and along the terrace to the front of the Abbey. They sat down in two garden-chairs outside the yellow drawing-room; and he sent a gardener for Jenkinson. Well-trained as he was, Jenkinson could not quite hide his surprise at finding Miss Carton the guest of the duke.

James Whitaker bade him bring tea to them; and it was not long coming. Elizabeth enjoyed the delicate cakes and the fruit exceedingly. She did not affect any lack of a healthy appetite. They sat talking for a long while after tea; then they strolled through the gardens for a while. They did not go again into the Abbey, for he was sure that at least a committee of the servants was watching them; and it was better that the gossips should not be able to say that she had been, unchaperoned, inside the Abbey with him. At a quarter to seven she said that she must be going home; and he walked with her down to the bridge.

Before they parted he asked her to meet him next morning at eleven; and she said readily enough that she would. But he thought that he perceived a faint shade of disappointment in her manner, and he took it that she had been expecting that they would meet again that evening.

"It's an awful nuisance," he said quickly. "But I've got to dine at Cubbington Grange to-night."

She frowned, and then said gravely: "Be careful that no one finds you out."

"Finds me out? There's no chance whatever of any one's finding me out. Why, even you haven't found me out."

"What do you mean?" she said quickly.

"Why, you don't know whether I'm the duke or not."

"I know perfectly well that you're not the duke!" she cried.

"Oh, no: you don't. You wish you did," he said in a taunting tone.

"I know quite well," she said firmly; and she walked across the bridge, carrying her head high and contemptuously.

He watched her out of sight and then walked slowly back to the Abbey, thinking of her very pleasantly.

He thought that he had better find out at what time he must be ready to start for the Grange, and went up to his suite of rooms. He found Tomkins in his bedroom setting out his clothes for the evening.

"Is it time for me to start dressing already?" he said grumpily.

"Well, your Grace, it being the country, they dine at eight—as your Grace has perhaps forgotten. And you'll want a good half-hour to do the twelve miles in. Leastways, Hibbert says as your Grace doesn't like to go fast, with your nerves like as they are after that lightning."

"Oh, very well!" growled James Whitaker; and he set about dressing.

When he had finished it occurred to him that baccarat was a very simple game and that it would be in-

deed hard to find an excuse for not playing it. Accordingly he took from the secret drawers of the bureau in his smoking-room five hundred dollars in notes and gold. He did not know how much a duke was expected to win or lose in an evening; but he made up his mind to limit his losses (since he knew nothing of the game, he was sure he must lose) to five hundred dollars. That should be sufficient to maintain his position.

He started for the Grange in a grumpy frame of mind, for he was thinking that it would have been so much more pleasant to spend the evening with Elizabeth in the park. But it was important, very important, that he should display himself firmly among his neighbors.

He was indeed somewhat nervous about his manners, especially his table manners, for though his wife had maintained fretfully in her home the standard she had brought back from her boarding-school, he was not sure that they would pass muster in one of the stately homes of England. Moreover, he was apt, in absent-minded moments, to revert to the manners he had used in William Ward's kitchen before marriage had promoted him to the parlor. But he was not very nervous; his two days' success and the good living had stimulated him so that he was almost ready to take pleasure in the struggle. It was a heartening thought that Elizabeth Carton, the actual witness of his transformation, was not sure whether he was, or was not, the Duke of Lanchester.

He found Cubbington Grange very unlike Lan-

chester Abbey. It was a large, modern, red-brick, imitation Tudor house; and its inferiority to the Abbey pleased him: dukes ought to have finer houses than barons. In the drawing-room he found his four guests of the day before and fifteen strangers. All the strangers seemed to have known the duke, for they greeted him warmly and heaped on him condolences on his accident. He thought it well not to change his attitude to the world, and was short and grumpy with them in a husky growl. They appeared to find his bearing everything they had expected.

He gathered that Lord Cubbington was a septuagenarian who dined in his own rooms. He took Lady Cubbington in to dinner; and since in the circumstances she could not be confidential, her nearness did not lessen his enjoyment of the meal. Indeed, he found the warm tenderness in her beautiful blue eyes very pleasant; and as soon as he learned that he was expected to press her foot, he pressed it with genuine conviction. The fact that she was a married woman had somehow grown less obtrusive.

The attention seemed to please her; and the tenderness in her eyes grew warmer. Once, when their neighbors were talking with animation about Mr. Lloyd George to people farther down the table, she said quickly in a low voice:

"Well, are you beginning to remember me better?"

"I never forgot you," he said readily.

She looked pleased, but she said: "Of course you say that. But all the same you had forgotten me yesterday afternoon."

"Never for a moment!" said James Whitaker stoutly.

The cooking was excellent, and the champagne admirable. James Whitaker felt that the only thing lacking to his complete well-being was to have Elizabeth Carton on the other side of him. Then he reflected that after all that might not add to his well-being: the two women might not prove sympathetic to each other. After all, the blue eyes of Lady Cubbington were of a wonderful and delightful blue.

Baccarat was the business of the evening; the dinner consisted of only five courses, and they did not linger over their coffee and cigarettes, but betook themselves briskly to the large drawing-room, in which a long table covered with green cloth had been set.

Lady Cubbington asked James Whitaker if he would like to take the bank; and he refused gloomily, declaring that the lightning-stroke had made his mind hazy about the game, and that therefore he had better watch it till he had learned it again. Sir Richard Starton then took the bank, a five-hundred-dollar bank; and they began to play.

James Whitaker soon learned the simple game; and he began to play. At first he played cautiously, feeling his way, staking only ten dollars at a time. He won steadily, and increased his stake to twenty-five dollars. He won steadily and increased it to fifty dollars. He still won steadily. He was not greatly elated, he only felt that it was as it should be: it was in the

very nature of things that dukes should win at baccarat.

Sir Richard Starton gave up the bank and Lord Dymchurch took it. He gave place to the Earl of Ashow. James Whitaker still won. Lady Cubbington was very pleased by his success, and sitting beside him, she faithfully followed his betting. It was pleasant to win, but after all he was winning for another man, his detested successor. But he did not find the game very amusing; and he felt that a duke must not show himself too eager to win money. After an hour of it, therefore, he rose and strolled out into the garden.

His mind was in a pleasant haziness; and it had not occurred to him that Lady Cubbington would naturally join him. Her coming startled him, therefore; and for a moment he thought of flying back to the baccarat. Second thoughts assured him not only that it would annoy her bitterly, but also that it would be unmanly. Besides, she looked prettier than ever in the moonlight. Still, he strolled up and down in front of the open windows of the bright drawing-room till he found that she was growing restive; then mere politeness demanded that they should stroll to a part of the garden lighted, and not too well lighted, only by the moon. Unused as he was to kissing, she had less reason to complain of him than the day before; he was losing his diffidence. Besides, the age of her husband weighed with him. Her talk threw light on the personalities and habits of his fellow guests; and his re-

ceptive mind stored up the information. After a while he suggested that they should return to their baccarat; and with some reluctance she came.

"It's no wonder you want to go on playing," she said. "You don't often win."

"Don't I?" he said.

"Of course you don't," she said quickly.

"I'd forgotten," he said. Then, squeezing her arm gently to mark the point, he added happily: "One can't be lucky in everything."

He felt, with some reason, that he was growing a gallant man.

But her words had put a new thought into his mind: it was to him, James Whitaker, that fortune was being kind; her bounty was not for the Dukes of Lanchester. It was true that he had started playing with the late duke's money; but that five hundred dollars was intact in his pocket; his winnings were his own. He wondered he had not perceived this earlier, and came back to the game with quite a new zest.

Fortune still smiled on him; and for an hour again he won steadily. Then the luck turned; and he began to lose. Ten minutes' losing was enough for him; and he rose and said that he must be going home. The announcement was received with the liveliest surprise; and he learned that they proposed to play for yet another two hours, and that the late duke had always been the very last to leave the table. But he was in no mind to weary fortune; losing, the game had lost its savor. He said that, after being struck by lightning, he must go to bed early for the next few days, and took

his leave. In the process of taking it, he learned that he was giving a dinner and a baccarat party at the Abbey on Saturday evening.

He had gone barely a mile when he found the drive in the moonlight so delightful that he bade his chauffeur make a circuit and prolong it. It was past midnight, therefore, when he reached the Abbey. He found Jenkinson himself sitting up for him, and portentous with news: the lightning had not confined itself with men of rank; it had also struck a tramp on Oak Tree Knoll. A keeper had found his body lying under the oak.

"What was he doing there?" growled James Whitaker.

"We think he must have been taking shelter, your Grace," said Jenkinson, who had himself questioned the keeper closely, and discussed the matter fully with the rest of the household at supper.

"Taking shelter? All that distance from the road? Nonsense!" growled James Whitaker.

"Well, now your Grace points it out, it *is* a long way from the road," said Jenkinson, in the tone of one impressed. "P'r'aps he was after pheasant eggs, your Grace."

"Well, anyhow, we couldn't have been struck by the same flash," growled James Whitaker, beginning to mount the stairs.

"No, your Grace. Where was your Grace when you were struck?"

"Do you suppose I can remember?" growled James Whitaker contemptuously.

Jenkinson felt himself justly rebuked.

James Whitaker found whisky and brandy and soda and sandwiches on the side-table in his smoking-room, mixed himself a brandy and soda, lighted a cigarette, sat down to the table and began to empty his pockets.

He had kept no count of his winnings, though he knew roughly that he had won a good deal more than five hundred dollars. He was surprised to find that they amounted to sixteen hundred and ten dollars.

The conviction that this sum was the fruit of his own luck and skill was greatly strengthened by its unexpected size. Indeed he had now no doubt about it; he was sure that the duke would have gone on playing after the luck turned, and lost it all. Every one of the other players had taken it for granted that he would do so. Undoubtedly his own self-restraint had brought him away a winner.

It was indeed a cheering conviction: here was more money than he had cleared from his business in the last three years. It relieved him of anxiety about the future for the next three years; it was the capital he needed to remove his business to a more thronged thoroughfare in Hammersmith. He could enjoy the rest of his week's holiday with a mind quite at ease. He thought of Elizabeth Carton and said: "Why, I might even make it ten days."

He went to bed joyful and awoke joyful. The possession of sixteen hundred and ten dollars had changed the world for him. It had made him a free man.

At breakfast he learned from Jenkinson that owing

to the fact that the body had been lying on Oak Tree Knoll for so long, the inquest on the dead duke would be held that very afternoon. He showed himself indifferent enough about the matter. He asked carelessly if anything had been found out about the man; and when Jenkinson said that nothing had, he said even more carelessly:

"I should rather like to know what he was doing in the wood."

When he had finished his breakfast, he opened his letters. He was vexed to find one from Lord Edward Beddard, in which he said that he was coming down to the Abbey on the following Wednesday on a matter of urgent importance. It seemed to James Whitaker that he had better depart on Tuesday night, or, at the latest, early on Wednesday morning; it was not worth while exposing himself to this fresh and considerable risk of being recognized for the sake of a few more hours at the Abbey: a brother might very well perceive differences which other people had missed. None the less, the thought of having to fly at a fixed time, when he had been resolved to vanish at his leisure, just when the fancy took him, irked his stubborn spirit.

He had just finished his breakfast when Mr. Lamplow, the architect from Lanchester, arrived. James Whitaker at once drove him in the racing car to the village and the hamlets, explained to him the improvements he proposed, and demanded his plans by Saturday night, that he might consider them at his leisure on Sunday, and post them off to the builders on Sunday night, so that he might have their contracts to

sign on Tuesday morning. He made it clear that he wanted contracts for each of the four places.

It was but natural, and it surprised him not at all, that he should find that his demand outraged the immemorial tradition of an honorable profession. The plans of cottages and of systems of drainage, though they might actually be made in a few hours, could not possibly be produced in a finished state in two days. But he was surprised to find that his ducal fury could not abate the tradition. He was forced to content himself with a compromise: Mr. Lamplow, an amiable bearded man, undertook to let him have the plan of the proposed drainage system of Little Lanchester ready by Saturday night; and when James Whitaker made it clear that he wished to have the builders actually at work on it on Wednesday morning, he offered to make his plan in conjunction with one of the Judsons, the chief firm of builders in Lanchester, so that they could prepare, and he could check their estimates as he went on. James Whitaker accepted this offer eagerly; but he went on to urge that plans of the three different cottages of which he wished the village and the outlying hamlets of Wodden, Chigleigh and Gant, to be composed, should be prepared in the same way. To this the architect agreed; and James Whitaker saw his way to pledging his successor to considerable improvements before his flight, for if the architect fulfilled his promises, he would be able to contract definitely for the sanitation and rebuilding of at least Little Lanchester. He ended by despatching the architect to Lanchester in the racing car to bring back with

him his own assistant and a representative of the firm of builders. Then he set about hustling Mr. Brinkman to have ready men to help them in the simpler parts of the work, and impressed on him deeply, by almost ferocious iteration, that it was his business to see that neither the architect, nor the builder, nor any of the helpers, wasted a moment.

He perceived that he had Mr. Brinkman thoroughly harried; but he also perceived that the straining steward would use every effort to carry out his orders. He was pleased with himself. He had never suspected that he possessed this capacity for organization.

CHAPTER VIII

JAMES WHITAKER had spent no long time on Mr. Lamplow; he had been indeed direct and to the point; with Mr. Brinkman he had been even more direct. Therefore he reached the bridge at a few minutes past eleven to find that Elizabeth had not yet come. As he waited for her the necessity of keeping her in a good temper during the rest of his short stay grew clearer to him than ever; it was a matter of the merest prudence to keep on the friendliest terms with her. He did not put it to himself as a pleasant thing; he put it to himself as a duty, sternly. If he could inspire into her so strong a friendliness as would prevent her telling the story of what she had seen on Oak Tree Knoll, even after he had disappeared, it would be so much the better. Not that he was in any great fear of the consequences if she did tell: it was a far cry from Lanchester to Hammersmith; and there was but little likelihood that he would be discovered once more buried in his natural obscurity. But it was better to take no chances, better that she should not tell at all.

Presently he was wondering, with no little earnestness, if it could by any means be brought about that he should sometimes meet her after he had retired from the Abbey. For a little while the prospect filled him with a keen exhilaration; but presently he aban-

doned the idea with a sigh: to what purpose would they meet? He was a married man.

Then Elizabeth came, fresh and charming and delightful; and his exhilaration returned. He felt a sense of ease and freedom with her which he had enjoyed in the case of no other woman. It may have been owing to the fact that his first careless and assured attitude to her had been to no small degree the fruit of the stimulating lightning-stroke, the bottle of champagne and the two glasses of '65 brandy. The stimuli were no more; but the attitude persisted.

She was greatly excited about the finding of the duke's body and the coming inquest, matters which had slipped well into the background of his mind. His plainly unaffected indifference about them impressed her. She had expected to find him nervous and anxious. His carelessness set her once more wondering whether he was not the duke, whether there was not some fantastic explanation of that change of clothes on Oak Tree Knoll. She talked to him about the discovery and the inquest at length; and he let her talk her fill. Never once did she stir him from his indifference.

At last she stopped talking about them, grew peaceful, simply ready to enjoy quietly his companionship. The thought of marrying him and becoming a duchess was at the moment far away in the background of her mind.

It was he who brought it into the foreground. In a sudden happy expansion of his spirit at the sight of her beautiful face he said:

"Well, if ever we do succeed in falling in love with each other, I shall have the most beautiful and charming duchess that ever was in England. The Gunning sisters can not compare with you."

She flushed as she said: "But it's you who are going to do the falling in love. There's no 'we' about it."

"No," he said thoughtfully.

Her statement of the conditions relieved him of any uneasiness lest she should fall in love with him, and be unhappy at his disappearance. Of course there had not been any real danger of that: his rugged-featured face was not at all likely to appeal to a girl of her age. None the less it was well to be quite sure.

"Who were the Gunning sisters?" she said.

He told her their story; and at the end of it she said impatiently: "That's the worst of living in a place like this: one never hears about interesting things." Then with a sigh she added: "And after all they were real dukes they married."

The suggestion that he was lacking in quality nettled him beyond all reason; and he said with some heat: "If ever I do marry you, you'll find that you've married a very real duke indeed."

"If ever *you* marry me?" cried Elizabeth with equal heat. "It was *I* who insisted on our being married."

"And I refused," growled James Whitaker.

"You didn't dare to refuse outright!" she said fiercely.

They glowered at each other. But even glowering she looked so pretty that James Whitaker saw on the instant the folly of wasting these golden hours.

"Well, well: it isn't worth scrapping about," he said in a placable tone. "What we've got to do is to fall in love with each other."

"No, no: there's no 'we' about it!" she cried. "I keep telling you so. It's you who object to a loveless marriage, not me. I haven't got to fall in love with you at all."

"Oh, well: have it your own way," said James Whitaker indulgently. "It's too fine a morning for scrapping."

She said a few words, in a less hostile tone, about the improbability of a real duke's using the word "scrapping." Then, when he refused to accept the challenge and try to justify his use of it, she began to discuss one of the novels she had borrowed the day before. It dealt with well-to-do people; and since he was ignorant of the attitude to life of the well-to-do, of their feelings and habits, he played but a poor part in the discussion.

He saved his reputation happily by saying: "You can't expect me to know about people of that kind. I never came into contact with these middle-class people —not intimate contact. Of course I see some of them: I see Doctor Arbuthnot and Brinkman. But what's that?"

Elizabeth gazed at him with a puzzled frown: his ignorance was manifestly genuine; and the inevitable conclusion was that either he was the real Duke of Lanchester, or a member of the lower classes. Yet his hands and his speech made the latter alternative impossible.

He perceived her bewilderment; and it pleased him. He enjoyed mystifying her. It shook her girlish assurance.

"I can't conceive why these writing fellows don't write their books about the right people," he growled.

Elizabeth eyed him with yet more puzzled eyes; then she said: "If by the right people you mean dukes and duchesses, how would authors get to know them? Besides, the interesting people aren't the people for whom everything is made quite smooth by money. They're the people who are struggling."

He was in full agreement with her. Indeed the sentiment had his deepest approval; but he said: "I don't agree with you at all. Now look at you. Things are made quite smooth for you; yet you're as interesting as can be."

Elizabeth looked pleased to be told that she was interesting; then she frowned deeply and said: "*Me! Me* have no trouble? Everything made smooth for *me?* When I'm shut up in this horrid little village all my life?"

"But you're not shut up in it. At least it's very unlikely that you'll stay shut up in it. Women with a face like yours always have things made easy for them, if they don't play the absolute fool."

"You're talking nonsense just to flatter me," said Elizabeth. "Of course I have to struggle."

"No, you don't," he said quickly. "It's I who have to struggle. I have to struggle not to get attracted by you too quickly. It would never do for the liking to be all on my side as well as the dukedom."

Elizabeth gazed at him thoughtfully, considering him. It was always possible that she might fall in love with him. . . . Certainly he was not by any means so ugly as she had considered him at first. . . . In fact, she was beginning to find the ruggedness of his face rather attractive. . . . It made him look the kind of man on whom one could rely. . . . And his eyes were very attractive, very fine gray eyes.

She turned her eyes from them, flushing a little; they were regarding her with an admiration she found disturbing.

They were silent for a while; then James Whitaker said abruptly: "By the way, what kind of a man is my brother Edward? I seem to remember that he's fat and beefy; and of course he's always bothering me for money. But what's he like?"

Elizabeth's eyes sparkled and her face flushed with a sudden anger as she cried: "Oh, he's a perfectly horrible person! Everybody says so! Why, one reason why I didn't go straight to the police and tell them that you weren't the duke was that if the duke was dead, Lord Edward Beddard would come into the title."

"Oh, he's as bad as that, is he? I'd got it in my mind that he was a bad lot," said James Whitaker carelessly.

"Oh, he is!" said Elizabeth with the most earnest conviction. "Besides, he insulted me."

"Insulted you?" cried James Whitaker. "Why didn't you tell me about it?"

"Why, you weren't here."

He had merely meant why had she not told him

sooner; but the chance was too good to miss; and he said with a good show of impatience: "Of course I was here! Why didn't you tell me?"

Elizabeth stared at him with eyes full of amazement. She stammered: "B-b-but I didn't know you then—at least n-n-not really."

"That doesn't matter. You ought to have come to me about it at once. You don't suppose I should let a blackguard like Edward go about insulting people *here*. I should have jumped on him hard," cried James Whitaker with a fine show of indignation.

"B-b-but I thought—w-w-we all thought you were like him," she stammered.

"Like Edward? Of course I'm not like Edward!" he cried, frowning angrily.

"I didn't know," said Elizabeth rather faintly, taken aback by his violence.

"Well, you ought to have known!" growled James Whitaker.

They were silent a while; and he scowled on.

Then she said: "Then you are the duke after all?"

"Of course I'm the duke," he growled.

In some odd way his anger that Lord Edward Beddard had insulted her had made him feel every inch a Duke of Lanchester. Also for the moment he looked it.

Then Elizabeth said, with some reluctance: "But if you're really the duke, I ought not to be meeting you like this."

"Why ever not? If you don't mind meeting a false

duke, why on earth should you mind meeting a real one?" he cried in considerable surprise.

Elizabeth rose with an air of the firmest determination and said: "If you are really the duke, you have such a bad character that I can't possibly go on meeting you."

"There's nothing like being quite frank," said James Whitaker.

"Besides, if you are the real duke, you're only making fun of me," she added.

She looked so determined that he said quickly: "You know I'm not the duke. You know that the real duke is dead. You saw his body lying under the oak."

Elizabeth's face was full of the uttermost bewilderment.

"I don't know what to believe," she cried. "You've muddled things up so completely now that I don't know whether you're the duke or whether you're not."

"Of course I'm not the duke, I tell you I'm not; do sit down!" he said impatiently.

She yielded to his imperative, not to say bullying, tone and sat down. But she did not look any less bewildered.

"Now we'll work things out on this theory, that I'm not the real duke, but in such a way that, if we fall in love with each other, you may become the Duchess of Lanchester, and that that scoundrel Edward may not come into the title. I'm to go on seeming to be the real duke. Does that satisfy you?"

He spoke in the same compelling, not to say bullying, tone; and she looked at him helplessly, almost stupidly.

"You've got me so thoroughly muddled that I don't know which you are," she complained.

"Oh, that's all right," he said cheerfully. "You'll soon get clear again; and we'll go on just as we are."

She shook her head and said: "I am so dreadfully muddled."

She looked muddled, mazed indeed; but also she looked charming. He was pleased that he had induced her to stay. Then his conscience began to reproach him. Why hadn't he let her go? . . . She had been convinced—definitely convinced that he was the real duke; and all danger from her had passed. . . . The only object of his meetings with her had been to secure her silence. . . . He had secured it safely, for good and all; and then he had quite deliberately thrown away the advantage at which he had been aiming, had deliberately awakened again her suspicions.

He did his best to feel surprised at his action, and to assure himself that he had been afflicted by a sudden access of idiocy. But at the bottom of his heart he knew very well that he had been actuated only by the keenest desire that she should continue to meet him.

Of course the meetings could lead to nothing. The vision of Millicent, pale, sandy, sharp-featured and querulous, rose in his mind. He hardened his heart and resolved, yet again, to have his holiday as pleasant as possible.

He looked at Elizabeth earnestly; she was looking at him with a still bewildered air. He lighted a cigar carefully and slowly. Then he said:

"You don't mind having these talks with me?"

"No: I—I like them. They're a change," she said.

"I like them too. But it isn't so much that as that they're necessary—that is, if you still want to be a duchess.

"Yes—I do," said Elizabeth; but her tone lacked something of its old certainty.

"That's all right," said James Whitaker.

They both felt, for no reason quite clear to them, that they had made a yet further advance in intimacy; and the talk turned on her earlier life. He learned that she was her father's only child, and had lived at Little Lanchester since she was six years old; but her childhood had been enlivened by the companionship of her cousin Henry, the son of an uncle, a tea-planter in India. Henry had spent his holidays at the vicarage during all his school-days, and had only gone to join his father in India at the end of the last autumn. The great period of her life had been her eighteenth year, which she had spent at a finishing school at Wimbledon. Since her cousin's departure she had enjoyed no society save that of Cissie Wyse.

"I expect you miss that cousin of yours," said James Whitaker, looking at her earnestly with suspicious eyes.

"Yes—I did," she said, flushing under his gaze.

James Whitaker disliked the flush heartily; and he said grumpily: "I expect he made love to you."

"Perhaps he did," she said; and the flush deepened.

James Whitaker felt the first pang of jealousy he had ever felt in his life, and its violence surprised him. He had not known that he was capable of jealousy.

"I believe you're engaged to him," he growled savagely.

"I'm nothing of the kind! Do you think I should be meeting you like this if I were?"

He felt somewhat comforted.

"Besides, there was no chance of it. I knew him too well. I knew him as well as I know myself," she said.

"Ah, well; you'll never know me very well," he said in a tone of gloomy satisfaction.

She looked at him and wondered. She did not think that she would. He certainly was interesting.

"Why not?" she said.

"Oh, a woman couldn't—or a man either," he said.

She was inclined to believe him; duke or no duke, he was certainly interesting.

The love-affairs of Elizabeth were no business of his: he was a married man. None the less, he resented bitterly the existence of Henry. He scowled at the thought of him.

"What's the matter? Why have you lost your temper?" she said.

"I haven't lost my temper," he said with an air of great dignity.

"Oh, yes, you have!" she cried, suddenly gleeful. "And I believe it's about Henry. But Henry doesn't count. He doesn't, really."

She went on to describe Henry at some length; and it grew quite plain that she had ruled that simple young man with a rod of iron. He understood dimly, by instinct, that such a man would never really take her fancy, that she would be only happy ruled, not ruling. The jealous oppression cleared from his heart, the scowl from his face.

"Oh, he's like that, is he?" he said in an easy tone when she came to the end of her description.

He leaned back against the bank, silent for a while, enjoying the cigar and the beauty of Elizabeth.

Then he said abruptly: "How did that brute Edward insult you?"

At first she refused to tell him, then changed her mind and said: "Well, you'll be thinking it ever so much worse than it was, if I don't. It was last October, and I met him in the lane which runs through the home wood, and he walked along with me. Of course, I'd known him ever since I was a child—a little. And then he grew offensive and tried to kiss me."

"The brute wants horse-whipping!" cried James Whitaker in a fine heat.

The jealousy with which he had only just become acquainted again flamed up in him, more furious. The thought of that hulking brute (he saw him as a hulking brute) kissing Elizabeth set his blood boiling.

"Oh, I did slap him—hard!" said Elizabeth.

"Slap him? I wish I'd been there with a broom-handle!" growled James Whitaker.

His face was set in the blackest of scowls.

His anger pleased her: it was so plainly genuine; and there was so much of it. Indeed, she thrilled a little to the savagery of his tone.

He seemed to be reflecting, and he still scowled. Then he burst out:

"I tell you what it is: if anything happened to me —if I disappeared or anything—and that blackguard took my place, you'd marry him."

"I shouldn't do anything of the kind!" cried Elizabeth, with great spirit.

"Yes, you would—just to be duchess," he growled.

"I should *not!* Why, *you* were bad enough—but Lord Edward Beddard! Oh, he's quite impossible! I shouldn't dream of it," she protested.

"Oh, yes, you would," he growled stubbornly.

"I should *not!*" she cried vehemently. "You've no business to say such a thing! It's—it's an insult!"

She sprang to her feet.

James Whitaker rose more slowly, his face grim and scowling. He was not going to retract what he had said; he was convinced that it was true.

She started along the bank with her head high in the air, her lips curled, and her nostrils dilated in an expression of offended scorn. James Whitaker walked beside her, his face one contracted scowl, his hands thrust deep in his pockets. For a hundred yards they walked in silence. Then she said haughtily.

"Aren't you going to apologize?"

"No; I'm not. It's true," growled James Whitaker in a tone of ill-repressed fury.

"Very well. I shan't speak to you till you do," she said very coldly.

"Then you won't speak to me for a long time," he said fiercely; and he meant it.

They parted stiffly at the bridge.

James Whitaker walked back to the Abbey in a towering rage. The thought of Lord Edward Beddard's attempt to kiss Elizabeth was infuriating, but the thought that after his return to his Hammersmith obscurity this loathed successor would at his ease and leisure prosecute his design on Elizabeth, and probably in the end marry her, was ten times more infuriating. He was infinitely more jealous of his successor, who had had but one interview, lasting perhaps a quarter of an hour, with her, than he was of the cousin Henry who had been so intimate with her all his life. Indeed, his natural dislike of his fortunate successor was beginning to grow into a firm detestation.

He came to lunch fuming, and received Jenkinson's account of the inquest on his predecessor's body with a snappish ill-temper which impressed on the butler's plastic mind the belief that that inquest was the last thing in the world of interest to his glowering master.

But the admirably cooked food, and the bottle of 1868 Château d'Yquem he drank with it, slowly soothed him to the point of reflecting with an almost dispassionate calm on the matter of leaving Elizabeth to his detestable successor. It had by now grown quite clear to him that they would marry. Was he justified in leaving her to such a wretched fate?

CHAPTER IX

HE had time and to spare to reflect on the matter, for, in his displeasure with Elizabeth that she should be willing to marry such an offensive blackguard as he felt his successor to be, he had not asked her to meet him that afternoon. During the hour after lunch he told himself more than once that he was not sorry that he was not meeting such a mercenary creature. None the less he found presently that he was not enjoying himself among the treasures of the Lanchesters with that fulness which a man on a holiday expects. His eyes would leave them to gaze out of the windows at the sunlight, and twice he found himself at the edge of the terrace, gazing down over the park without quite knowing why he had come there. The pleasing sight of Elizabeth did not meet his eyes.

He did not take the usual pleasure in his tea, though the cream was as rich, the cakes as delicate as ever; the cigar he smoked after it lacked something of its usual flavor. He found himself suffering from a vague dissatisfaction with life; and he could not perceive the cause of it.

After tea he went, somewhat listlessly, into the yellow drawing-room, which was full of the treasures of the East, and took from a cabinet a tray of ivory ne-

tsuke. He was examining them through a large reading-glass, when the door opened softly. Thinking that it was Jenkinson, or a footman, come for instructions about something, he did not turn his head, but gazed on intently at the figure he was admiring. Then two soft hands were laid gently over his eyes and a voice whispered:

"Guess who it is."

"Elizabeth," said James Whitaker joyfully.

The hands were swiftly lifted, and an imperious voice he did not know cried in accents of the bitterest indignation:

"Elizabeth! Who is Elizabeth?"

He turned his head sharply to see a very pretty black-eyed, black-haired woman, with a fine color in her clear-skinned cheeks, glaring down on him with an air as indignant as her tone.

"Who is Elizabeth?" she cried again.

He gazed at her in a blank astonishment, remembered himself, and growled huskily: "Who are you? I'm hanged if I haven't forgotten!"

The lady's expression changed swiftly from extreme anger to extreme dismay. She stared at him with incredulous eyes; her face fell; the corners of her lips drooped; and she cried in a lamentable voice:

"What? You've forgotten your Emily?"

James Whitaker gazed at her with knitted brow, collecting all his wits to meet the emergency. The lady was of the same type as Elizabeth, but not so good an example of it. She was a little shorter and a little plumper, but yet of a good figure. Also she was

older. But even in that hurried, harassed scrutiny he found her far more attractive than Lady Cubbington. And she was his, or rather his predecessor's Emily.

He said slowly, scowling as if in a struggle with his memory:

"Emily — Emily . . . I know the name . . . wait a minute. . . . I'm beginning to remember—"

"But it's horrible your forgetting me like this! Perfectly horrible!" wailed the lady.

"It isn't me; it's the lightning," he protested.

"That doesn't make it any less horrible!" she cried.

With that she burst into tears, sank down on to his knee, threw her right arm around his neck and kissed him.

"I-I-I-I—t-t-t-thought—you l-l-l-loved—m-m-me!" she sobbed.

The suddenness of her disturbing action took James Whitaker utterly aback. He put his left arm around her; but that was a wholly instinctive action. He could not find words; that required an effort of will.

He was wondering whether his safety did not demand that he should kiss her, when she gave a little sniff and drew away so that he could see her face; and he saw a faint bewilderment gather on it. Then she drew back to the length of her arm and stared into his face with all her eyes, her bewilderment plainly growing and growing.

"Why . . . why . . . What is it?" she said faintly.

"What's what?" he said in a sudden disquiet.

"Why, you . . . you!" she said, drawing yet

farther away. "Why . . . why . . . it isn't you! You're not . . . no; you're not the duke!"

She sprang to her feet, and her eyes blazed at him.

Relieved of her immediate oppressive nearness, he felt much better able to grapple with the situation.

"It's that confounded lightning," he growled huskily. "I can't make out what it's done to me exactly. It's destroyed my memory. . . . It's stiffened my throat muscles so that I can hardly speak. . . . It's half paralyzed my right arm. But it's done something besides all that, and I can't make out what. But I'm not the same person—there's no doubt about it."

"The lightning? Yes; I read about the lightning in the papers," she said.

"Yes, that confounded electricity," he growled.

She seemed to hesitate, came a step nearer, and peered earnestly into his face. He met her searching gaze with steady unconcerned eyes.

"You look like the duke, and you speak like the duke—exactly," she said in a doubtful voice. "But I feel that you're not the duke. I feel that your face of the duke is a mask hiding some one else. Besides, you smell so different."

"And so would you, if you'd been struck by lightning! It would make any one smell different—a regular bath of electricity!" he growled.

"Of course there is the electricity," she said in a shaken tone, and her eyes fell before his steady gaze.

"The wonder is it left anything to smell at all," he growled.

Her expression was again mere bewilderment.

Then once more her eyes flashed, and she cried fiercely: "No, I don't believe it. If you were the duke, you'd never have forgotten me—never!"

"Why, it made me forget my own name—my Christian name," he growled.

"I don't care! I don't believe it! I don't believe you are the duke!" she cried, yet more fiercely.

James Whitaker gazed at her, cudgeling his brains for some way of convincing her that he was the duke. He could find none. Then her chin caught his eye.

"All right," he growled. "Have it your own way. You always were as obstinate as a mule."

"Obstinate? Me obstinate? Well, you're the last person in the world to say that!" she cried a little breathlessly.

"Well, but you are. You know, if you get a thing into your head, you won't let any one get it out. I almost remember telling you so."

Her face cleared a little, and she said: "Well, you did say something of the sort—once."

"Only once—get out!" he growled. "I'm beginning to remember."

He wished he had taken the pains to read the bundle of her letters which were, doubtless, in the bureau drawer.

"It's most extraordinary," she murmured; and her face cleared yet more.

"Of course it is," he growled impatiently. "Very few people get struck by lightning."

"I don't mean that. I mean it's extraordinary it has changed you so—so that you even smell different."

"Oh, that's your fancy," he growled.

"It's nothing of the kind! You *do* smell different!" she cried.

"So would you, I tell you, if you'd had a bath of electricity. I'm sure I smell all right."

"Oh, I didn't say you didn't," she said quickly.

He was relieved: plainly he had banished most of her doubt. But he was eager to banish all of it; he wished her to tell no one of it. If only he had read her letters he could have clenched his assertion that he was the duke by the display of some impressive piece of knowledge of her. He cudgeled his brains for some method of clenching it without that special knowledge. He wondered how his predecessor treated her. Then he had a happy thought: she was undoubtedly attractive—very attractive: suppose he let himself go. Perhaps he would be most like the duke if he did let himself go.

He suddenly grabbed her, pulled her down on to his knee, hugged her tightly and kissed her with the vehemence Lady Cubbington had demanded of him.

He seemed to have discovered by instinct the course of action his predecessor would have pursued, for she did not try to struggle out of his arms; she only said somewhat breathlessly:

"The electricity has left you just as rough as ever."

"Oh, that's all right," he growled; and he kissed her again.

"And you certainly haven't forgotten how to kiss," she said in a tone of some satisfaction.

"Oh, I'm beginning to remember all right," he growled cheerfully.

He felt that he had swept away the last of her suspicions; and his mind was at ease, even though the process of ridding her of them had brought him into a position which accorded ill with the fact that he was a respectable married man. It was at the moment quite clear to him that the preservation of his secret was of far greater importance than a pedantic propriety of marital attitude.

The lady shifted her position a little, and said plaintively: "But how could you forget me at all?"

"It wasn't me. It was the lightning," he said quickly: and instinctively he kissed her again.

He observed that it seemed far more natural to him to kiss her than it had been to kiss Lady Cubbington. He wondered whether this were the result of practise, or of the fact that he found her more attractive than Lady Cubbington.

"But if you really cared for me it couldn't have done anything of the kind."

"Oh, come: it made *you* think that I wasn't myself!" he cried.

She sniffed once or twice and knitted her brow with a faintly troubled air. He hoped that her suspicions were not going to revive.

"The fact is, it dropped a veil between us," he said hastily, to divert her attention from the change in him.

"I know what it really is," she cried; and her eyes were suddenly sparkling brightly. "It's that horrid Cubbington woman. You've been seeing a lot of her."

"She had nothing to do with it—nothing whatever," he said hastily

"Then you *have* been seeing a lot of her."

"No, no: just at lunch once and an evening at baccarat," he said; and instinctively he kissed her again.

"Don't do that! You've been kissing *her!*" she cried.

"Nothing of the kind," he growled without pausing to reflect upon the truth of the assertion.

"As if I'm likely to believe that! She dragged you into a corner and made you."

"She did nothing of the kind! I wouldn't allow it!" he cried with some heat.

"It wouldn't matter what you allowed with a horrible woman like that. You're just wax in her hands."

"I'm nothing of the kind!" he growled with yet greater heat.

"You are," she said firmly. "Why, she told Maria Addenbroke that you're going to marry her when Cubbington dies; and Maria would hardly believe me when I told her that it's me you're going to marry if anything happens to Harry in Central Africa."

James Whitaker felt somewhat chilled: he wished he knew who the lady was; he wished he knew who Harry was; and, above all, he wished that his predecessor had not made this exceedingly dubious arrangement with different ladies. It must have been a *tic.*

"Of course there was some arrangement," he said feebly.

"Some arrangement! Is that how you speak about it?" she cried, and made as if to rise.

It was rather James Whitaker's arm than James Whitaker's will which retained her on his knee. His subconscious self seemed to find something pleasing and harmonious in an attitude of which his conscious self could but deplore the necessity.

She yielded to the instinctive, retaining pressure.

"It's the lightning," he growled.

"But it's me you really care for, dear?" she said softly.

"Of course it is," he said firmly; and once more, instinctively, he kissed her.

"That lightning has made one good change in you," she said in a tone of gratification. "Your kisses aren't so—so grudging."

He was pleased by this compliment. Then he remembered that he had earned it by following the injunctions of Lady Cubbington. It seemed to him odd that he should not have learned from Millicent how to kiss properly; but on further reflection it did not seem odd to him: Millicent had been more interested in culture. He kissed Emily twice firmly. It seemed to him the least he could do.

She seemed to have relaxed from her tense jealousy, and was nestling against him in a peaceful satisfaction. He, too, was content to be silent; and at last enjoyed a breathing-space in which to grasp his exact position. He was undoubtedly nursing a lady, probably a lady of title; and he was not revolted, or even embarrassed, by the action. He found that, owing to some odd kink in his mind, of which he had hitherto been quite unaware, it was her prettiness which made it thus easy

for him. He felt that had she been unattractive he would have found it quite awkward and unpleasant. He was surprised to find himself more than once vaguely regretting that it was not Elizabeth Carton he held upon his knee. But he was compelled to admit that Emily was a fair substitute. He kissed her thoughtfully.

With an arm round his neck she gabbled to him fondly. Also she spoke now and again of Harry with genuine affection; and he gathered that he was her husband, and engaged in hunting big game in Central Africa. This affection seemed the stranger to him that she had definitely arranged to marry the late duke, should a lion or some other of the African fauna devour Harry.

She talked of the arrangement, however, with a natural, unaffected simplicity quite irreconcilable with any sense of moral depravity; and it was plain that his predecessor had regarded it with a like simplicity. James Whitaker began to suspect that his own Hammersmith attitude to conjugal responsibility might be at fault. After all, now that he came to think of it, he had taken his views on marriage second-hand from his cultured wife; and Millicent was strongly feminist. Plainly in this higher sphere quite other conceptions obtained. Perhaps he ought to reconsider the matter carefully.

He kept wishing he knew a little more about the lady; it was hardly safe to leave their intercourse a monologue. After a while his chance came. The

afternoon was hot; the lady was plump; she moved into an armchair; and said that she had left her fan with her dust-coat. He rose and hurried out into the hall to fetch it.

There he found Jenkinson, and said with great asperity: "Why on earth don't you show people in properly—yourself? Why do you let them come dashing in on me just anyhow?"

"B-b-but Lady M-M-Middlemore always d-d-does," stammered Jenkinson.

"Well, see that she doesn't—not, at least, when my nerves are all upset by being struck by lightning. Where does she come from?"

"Yes, your Grace. London, your Grace. She came in a taxi from Lanchester."

"Then bring her in some tea. Why haven't you done it?"

"Your Grace has forgotten that her ladyship likes grapes and benedictine at this time, your Grace," said Jenkinson, waving his hand toward a silver tray on which they were.

"Well, why haven't you brought them in to her?" cried James Whitaker.

Jenkinson coughed a faint distressed cough, and said: "But your Grace has forgotten. Your Grace has given instructions—more than once—that I am not to bring tea till you ring for it."

"Oh, bring in those grapes! And a fan, too!" growled James Whitaker.

He went back into the drawing-room; and in two minutes Jenkinson brought the grapes, the benedictine

and the fan. James Whitaker, as politeness bade, ate grapes and drank a glass of the liqueur with sufficient pleasure. When she was lighting a cigarette after them he said:

"When's Middlemore coming home?"

"Oh, you are beginning to remember!" she cried. "I didn't think you remembered my name!"

"I never forgot it," said James Whitaker firmly.

They talked about her husband for a while; and he learned several facts which might prove useful. Then she suggested that they should go up to his smoking-room, since it would be cooler. He was on the point of accepting the suggestion when it occurred to him that his suite of rooms was so very private and compromising, and that after all he was a married man. He said hastily that the garden would be cooler still; and though she pouted and protested that she hated gardens, into the garden they went. They strolled about it; and he gathered that she knew it well, for at frequent intervals he found that they had come into a retired nook. It was quite plain to him on each occasion that she expected him to be tender; and he felt that his predecessor had committed him to tenderness. However, he found it less and less difficult on each fresh occasion.

Nevertheless, there was a faint dissatisfaction in her air and in her voice; and he wondered whether his tenderness, in spite of the fact that he was doing his best, lacked genuine conviction. Suddenly, with the air of one who makes a thrilling discovery, she cried:

"I know what it is! It's Elizabeth!"

"What's Elizabeth?" he said, somewhat startled.

"It's Elizabeth who's changed you so. I thought it was that Cubbington woman."

"It isn't Elizabeth. It's the lightning," he protested.

"Oh, yes, it is. Who *is* Elizabeth?" she said firmly.

He hesitated long enough to perceive clearly that he must by no means make an admission about Miss Carton; that his predecessor's general behavior did not allow of it.

"There isn't any Elizabeth," he said firmly.

"Oh, yes, there is!" she cried. "When I put my hands over your eyes you said it was Elizabeth."

"It was the first name which came into my head. I only said it to score off you."

His husky growl imparted a certain air of verisimilitude to the statement; uttered in an ordinary voice, she would have rejected it on the instant.

"I don't believe it," she said in a tone which lacked conviction.

"All right: don't," he said, and laughed.

"Oh, you are aggravating!" she cried.

"That's what you're always saying," he growled, at a venture.

"Never mind! I shall find out!" she cried angrily.

She was really angry; and it was some time before he soothed her. But he learned that it had been the habit of the late duke to enrage her at least once every time they met; and he was glad that he had instinctively done the same thing. Certainly his attitude and manners had convinced her that he was the duke; she

no longer attached any credit to the suggestion of her nostrils.

When her anger had abated they talked peacefully about their common friends; or, rather, to be exact, she talked, and he confined himself to monosyllabic comment on what she said. He was patiently acquiring more facts, when it occurred to him that he was acquiring far more than he could possibly need between now and the morning of the next Wednesday. None the less he did not relax his attention.

At seven o'clock she said that she must be going. He pressed her to stay to dinner with him. Since it was unlikely that he would see the indignant Elizabeth that evening, it seemed to him that the society of Lady Middlemore would be the next most pleasant thing within his reach. But she declared that she must catch the seven-thirty-five train from Lanchester to London, that all her arrangements compelled her to be in town by nine. He let her go reluctantly.

As he watched, regretfully, the cab disappear through the distant gates of the park, he suddenly realized that he was beginning to feel uncommonly like an unmarried man. He could not decide whether it was owing to the fact that a veil, or rather a series of veils, was falling between him and the old life at Hammersmith, and that Millicent seemed very far away, or whether it was a case of evil communications corrupting good manners. Whichever of the two it might be, it was quite clear that if the deplorable conduct of the late duke forced him into contact with many more ladies whom the necessity of self-preserva-

tion compelled him to treat with the tenderness he had lavished on Lady Cubbington and Lady Middlemore, his domesticated nature would become a thing of the past.

He came into the Abbey great hall rather sadly, for he would have enjoyed Lady Middlemore's society at dinner. But without it he enjoyed that meal far more than he had enjoyed his tea, for in some way she had blunted for the time being his desire for the society of Elizabeth. After dinner he found that the flavor of his cigar had regained its delicate excellence.

But he had smoked barely an inch of it when the desire for the society of Elizabeth returned in all its strength.

It wanted but a few minutes to nine, and it seemed to him that he might very well go down to the bridge to see whether she had by any chance come to it. He felt it to be very unlikely that she had come, but he felt that he must make sure.

She was not at the bridge, and he sat on the parapet for a while smoking. Then he thought that she might have come in the direction of the bridge without caring to come right to it, and he took the path along the farther bank of the stream to the village. He had not gone very far along it when he saw a white gown at the next stile, and he was surprised by the way his heart leaped at the sight, and even more surprised by the intensity of his disappointment when he found that the gown contained a village girl. He walked on, rather more briskly, to the end of the field-path, and from it looked down the empty street to the village.

He sat on the stile for a while, waiting to see if Elizabeth would appear. When she did not he walked down the street. There were still a few of the villagers sitting about the doors of their cottages, and it seemed to him that there was little cordiality in the civil greetings they gave him as he passed. Again he regretted that he would not be long enough at the Abbey to change their feeling about him. Beyond the village stands the church, and beyond the church the vicarage. He was walking very quietly in his pumps, and when he came to the hedge of the vicarage garden he peered through it. His heart leaped again at the sight of Elizabeth sitting in a garden-chair under a tree in the middle of the lawn. He came through the garden gate very quietly, and since she seemed buried in a reverie she did not see him until he was within a few feet of her. When she did see him, she started to her feet with a faint cry of surprise and dismay.

"Why ever have you come here?" she cried.

"Why shouldn't I come here?" he said calmly. "If we're going to get to know each other thoroughly, with a view to being married, I ought to see you in your own home."

"But my father: he won't believe—he'll be awfully upset if he finds that I know you—like this. I wasn't going to tell him anything about it till everything was settled. You know what a bad character you've got."

"No, I don't. I've forgotten. And anyhow, that lightning-stroke has changed it altogether. It must have."

"But my father doesn't know that. He'll be perfectly horrified to find you here with me."

"Well, I can't help that. I *had* to come. We never fixed up a meeting this evening when we said good-by to-day."

"As if I'd come after what you said!" she cried.

"Well, that was exactly what I wanted to see you about," he said quickly. "I realized after you had gone that you believed I was really in earnest about Edward. Of course I was only joking. You'd no more dream of marrying Edward than I would of impersonating the Duke of Lanchester."

She looked at him with somewhat mollified eyes, and said grudgingly: "Well, I think that's a silly kind of joke."

"Perhaps it is," he said.

"Besides, I don't know that you're not impersonating the Duke of Lanchester."

"Oh, yes, you do—in the bottom of your heart," he said firmly.

"I don't," she said. "But now that you've apologized we might get out of this garden before my father, or some villager, sees us. People wouldn't understand. And suppose after all we didn't—didn't fix things up, they would gossip and gossip."

"Oh, we shall fix things up all right," he said cheerfully. "But there's no point in your running any unnecessary risk. Where shall we go?"

She led the way across the lawn to a little gate opening into the churchyard, crossed it to a gate on its farther side, went through it and up a path through

a thicket. From the end of the thicket he saw, about a mile away, the back of the Abbey; and five minutes' walk brought them into the park. They turned up the side of it, under the trees.

"Why didn't you come to the bridge at nine as usual? We might have had ever so much more time together," he said in a reproachful tone.

"It was likely I should come! After what you said! And when you'd been spending all the afternoon with Lady Middlemore!" cried Elizabeth.

"Oh, come: it wasn't all the afternoon. She didn't come till after tea," he protested.

"I expect you thought I shouldn't know anything about it, because she came in a taxicab."

"I never thought about it," he said.

"No, you wouldn't! You were so taken up with her that you couldn't think of anything else," she said almost fiercely; and he was surprised by the flame of anger in her eyes.

He was taken aback by this sudden vehemence.

"Oh, I wasn't taken up with her so much as that."

"You ought to be perfectly ashamed of yourself! You know you ought!" she cried.

"What about?" he said, even more taken aback.

"You know quite well!"

"I'll be hanged if I do!" he said with conviction.

"You know you've no business to be spending the whole afternoon with that woman when you're engaged to me!"

"This is rather sudden," he said faintly. "Do you mean to say you've fallen in love with me already?"

"Certainly not!" she cried.

"I thought you couldn't have—so soon."

"I should think not!"

"Then why are you so annoyed by my spending an hour or two with Lady Middlemore?"

"I—I—I'm not annoyed. . . . It isn't that. . . . I don't care about Lady Middlemore. . . . It isn't that that annoys me. . . . But what's the use of our trying to get to like each other if you spend all your time with other women?" said Elizabeth in an explanatory tone.

"But I don't," said the obtuse James Whitaker. "I spend most of it with you."

Elizabeth was too young and beautiful to snort. The noise she made could only have been described as a snort had it come from an older and less beautiful woman.

They walked on in silence for a while. James Whitaker gazed at her with puzzled interest. He had gathered both from his reading and from his intercourse with old Amy that women were not logical creatures; but he wished that he could grasp Elizabeth's exact point of view.

At last he said sapiently: "Look here: if you weren't really annoyed about Lady Middlemore you wouldn't be so jealous."

"Jealous! . . . Of that woman? . . . About *you?*" gasped Elizabeth.

"Well, it must be jealousy," he said in a patiently instructive tone. "You wouldn't be so angry if it

weren't. And I tell you what: if you're as jealous as this, you *must* be beginning to fall in love with me."

The laugh of Elizabeth was more like the snarl of an exceedingly angry wolf than any human sound. She ground her teeth; her face was flushed; her eyes were shining very brightly.

"In love with *you?*" she said in an indescribable tone.

"Perhaps you're not conscious of it—yet. But that's what it must be," he said, with an air of illumination.

Elizabeth said nothing; she turned on her heel, and began to retrace her steps briskly. She was panting a little.

He perceived that he had said enough for the time being, and though he wished that he had not failed to grasp her exact attitude, his instinct assured him that this was not the time to continue his researches. He let her go some distance in silence; then he began to talk tactfully of the beauty of the moonlit park.

Her anger was fierce, but short-lived. Presently she was listening to him; then she glanced at him several times with cold suspicion.

Then she said: "I'm sure you must have found Lady Middlemore's conversation a great deal more interesting than this. You had so much more to talk about."

"You've forgotten that it must have been the first time I met her," he said.

"But it wasn't the first time she'd met you," she said quickly.

"Apparently not."

"And didn't she recognize that you weren't the duke?"

"She was convinced that I was."

Elizabeth's eyes began to gleam again.

"And did she—did she talk to you exactly as if you were the duke?"

"I couldn't see any difference," he said thoughtfully.

"Then it's perfectly disgusting; and you ought to be ashamed of yourself!" she cried.

"Well, I couldn't be rude, could I?"

"And did she—did she—oh, how are we to get to like each other if this kind of thing goes on?" she almost wailed.

"What kind of thing?" he said disingenuously.

"You know perfectly well!"

"Well, if you mean ladies calling on me, I suppose they will. They do call on dukes," he said.

She walked on in silence to the entrance of the path through the thicket.

At the stile she stopped and bade him come no farther.

"Very well. But will you meet me at the bridge at eleven to-morrow? By to-morrow you'll see that it's all nonsense about Lady Middlemore," he said.

She looked at him very doubtfully, shook her head and said: "I don't know. I don't think I shall. I don't want to."

"You ought to, you know," he said.

"I know one thing," she said quickly. "When we

—if we ever do—arrange things I won't have anything to do with this Smart Set—so there! There must be other sets for duchesses. Good night."

She went quickly, without shaking hands with him.

CHAPTER X

JAMES WHITAKER walked slowly to the Abbey, pondering those two illuminating words "Smart Set." They made so much that had puzzled him clear. He had read much about it in the evening papers; and naturally, as a member of that set, the late duke *would* make arrangements to marry various ladies (he wondered for a moment how many more there were of them) should their husbands expire. It did not occur to him that this was purely a personal idiosyncrasy. Naturally, too, the late duke had been careless of his rank, his name, his family and his responsibilities; he had only valued them for the money and pleasures they brought him. Naturally, the inhabitants of Little Lanchester disliked their scorching, grasping lord.

But he was surprised that a duke should belong to the Smart Set. He had had a dim idea that it was composed only of inferior noblemen, American millionaires, and other rich tradesmen; he had thought that dukes were above it.

He was in full sympathy with Elizabeth; and undoubtedly there must be another set for duchesses, and for dukes too. Had he been going to remain a duke, he would certainly make haste to withdraw from

his predecessor's circle of friends into an atmosphere more congenial to his once so domesticated nature. As it was, he might as well make the best of them till the evening of the next Tuesday, using them to make his holiday as pleasant as possible.

At breakfast next morning he was annoyed by the long accounts, in the London papers, of the inquest on his predecessor. The coincidence of a duke and a tramp having been struck by lightning at the same time in the same wood was the kind of fare for which their readers were greediest; and they had made as much of it as possible. James Whitaker felt their insistence on the coincidence to be dangerous. It made him the more eager to return to his obscurity before Lord Edward Beddard should come to the Abbey.

It was this eagerness which despatched him directly after breakfast to Mr. Brinkman's office to inquire what progress had been made in the preparation of the plans of the alterations in Little Lanchester. Mr. Brinkman received him gloomily, without rubbing his hands together, and assured him that Mr. Lamplow had spent the day before, along with his two assistants, taking measurements, and that they had been at work again since eight that morning. James Whitaker was very pleased to hear it; their energy promised to let him escape safely, the contracts signed and his successor committed to his scheme, on Tuesday night. The work would be half done before they began to suspect that he had disappeared for good.

He thought it well to encourage the workers in this strenuousness, and strolled down to the village. He

found Mr. Lamplow hard at work; and with him, notebook in hand, Mr. Judson, the chief builder of Lanchester. He said a few affable words of appreciation to them, and presented either of them with one of his fine cigars. He left them striving hard indeed to humor his whim for speed.

As he came back down the village, he met Doctor Arbuthnot, stopped and greeted him with a cheeriness as gratifying as it was unexpected.

"I'm getting on, Doctor," he growled. "My memory hasn't all come back; but some of it has. My arm is getting less stiff, and so is my throat."

"Good, your Grace—good, I'm pleased to hear it," said the beaming doctor.

"I'm inclined to fancy that, bar that loss of memory and stiffness, the electricity did me good. I'm feeling more cheerful."

"Yes, yes: a large dose like that would indeed have a tonic effect," said the doctor. "I've no doubt that when you've quite recovered from these temporary disabilities you'll be much the better for it—much the better."

"It was a queer thing that tramp's getting struck too," said James Whitaker.

"Very queer indeed, your Grace. In fact, it was quite mysterious. And judging from his hands and his extreme cleanliness, he must have been a man who had seen better days."

"Had he now?" said James Whitaker in a tone of quiet interest.

"Yes. But I didn't dwell on it at the inquest. I

know how your Grace dislikes these newspaper fusses —especially about things which happen about here."

"Quite right—quite right. They don't do any one any good."

"No, your Grace. And it was odd his being on Oak Tree Knoll—so far from the road, your Grace."

"Jenkinson told me he had gone there for shelter," said James Whitaker.

"He'd hardly go so far for shelter; there's plenty nearer the road than that."

"No—perhaps not. Well, we shall get to know all about it one of these days. These things always come out. Good morning, Doctor," said James Whitaker cheerfully; and he walked on.

He was pleased to have the chance of being affable once more to the doctor. He might always prove a useful friend.

He felt that he had already done a good morning's work; but on reaching the Abbey he found that it was only half past ten. He took from the bureau the bundle of letters his predecessor had received from Lady Middlemore and read a number of them carefully. In several he found pieces of gossip about people with whom he had played baccarat, and stored them in his mind since they might prove useful that evening.

At eleven o'clock he was at the bridge in the hope of finding Elizabeth. But no Elizabeth came; and his disappointment was keen. At a quarter past eleven, therefore, he crossed the bridge and took the path through the wood to the village. There was a sharp

turn in it just before the gate of the wood. He came round the corner to find Elizabeth sitting on the gate.

Possibly the elevation to his exalted station was inspiring into him the diplomatic spirit, for he said reproachfully. "So you never came after all."

"I never meant to come," said Elizabeth stiffly.

He leaned against the gate-post, looking up in a very pleasant content at her charming face. He had no desire to talk; at the moment it was enough to gaze. But he had to talk; and he said several things about the weather. Elizabeth replied coldly and ungraciously; but he was not hurt. He took it that women were like that; besides, he had read somewhere that it was foolish to lose your temper with angry women or children.

At last he changed the subject and asked her a direct question about herself; and presently she was telling him of the year she had spent at school. It had been the great period in her life; and to a man of less domesticated nature than himself these great happenings would have sounded trivial. His simplicity enabled him to take a sympathetic interest in them which completed the process of appeasement.

Presently she came down from the gate; they walked back through the wood, across the stream, and along its bank to their sheltered nook. There she took up for a while the tale of what she would do when she was a duchess. She learned from him that he had already put in hand the work of rebuilding and draining the village; and she was indeed pleased with the quickness with which he had acted on her suggestion.

Presently she said thoughtfully: "There's no doubt that we could do lots of good when we're the duke and duchess."

"Rather," he said cheerfully.

On their way back to the bridge she said that she would like to fish the stream; and he learned that she had for years fished the free water lower down it, on the farther side of Little Lanchester. He begged her to fish it, since they could still continue the process of settling their future relations while she fished. Moreover, did any one see them together, it would afford an excellent excuse for her presence in the park. She said she would begin that very afternoon.

At three o'clock that afternoon, since he did not find her at the bridge, he strolled along the bank of the stream. Before he had gone three hundred yards down it he heard her voice, and along with it a man's voice. He was surprised, disagreeably surprised, to find that she had a male acquaintance; and since his curiosity was awakened he walked quietly along among the trees which bordered the stream.

From some distance away he caught the words: "But you ought ter 'ave a written permit from Mr. Brinkman himself, miss; and well you know it."

James Whitaker breathed a sigh of relief: it was only a keeper with her.

"But I tell you, Pittaway, the duke himself gave me leave," came the voice of Elizabeth in firm tones.

"I don't know nothing about that," growled the keeper. "My orders is to stop anybody fishing without a written permit from Mr. Brinkman."

"Well, I haven't got any written permit from Mr. Brinkman," said Elizabeth.

"Then you'll 'ave ter stop fishing. 'Is Grace's leave makes no matter at all. You know quite well, miss, as Mr. Brinkman keeps this fishing for 'imself and 'is friends; an' you've got to stop."

"I shan't do anything of the kind!" cried Elizabeth.

"Then I shall take your rod away, miss," said the keeper in a surlier tone than ever.

James Whitaker came sharply round the clump of hazels which hid him from the speakers, to find Elizabeth, very finely flushed, facing an old keeper with a red, gnarled and very surly face.

"What's this? What's this?" cried James Whitaker in deep husky tones. "What the devil do you mean by interfering with this young lady when I've given her leave to fish, Pittaway?"

The keeper turned sharply, blenching.

"P-p-please, your G-G-Grace, it's Mr. B-B-Brinkman's orders," he stammered.

"You lying old blackguard! You're just making use of them to be rude to Miss Carton!" roared James Whitaker.

"S'welp me! I'm not, your Grace! Them is 'is orders!" cried the keeper.

"Then you go straight to Mr. Brinkman and tell him that no one—no one!—is to fish this stream without leave from me! And you take a week—or a month's notice—whichever it may be, and clear out!" roared James Whitaker. "Be off!"

"B-b-but I've bin in your G-G-Grace's service all

my life," stammered the keeper in accents of the deepest dismay.

"Go and tell Mr. Brinkman what I've just told you! Be off!" roared James Whitaker.

The keeper slunk away. James Whitaker turned to Elizabeth, bade her good afternoon and apologized for the behavior of Pittaway.

Elizabeth was looking a little frightened; the flush had faded from her cheeks; there was, if anything, rather less color in them than usual.

"So you are the duke after all," she said in a hushed voice.

"Because I make such a noise when I'm angry?"

"Not exactly that. But you—you look like a duke when your're angry."

"Well, I'm glad I look like a duke sometimes."

"Oh, you *do!*" said Elizabeth with conviction. "But you're not really going to discharge Pittaway. He was only carrying out orders."

"Of course I am. He threatened you."

Elizabeth flushed faintly with pleasure.

"Oh, but I don't want him discharged!" she cried.

James Whitaker hesitated. He had been furiously annoyed with the man; but he had no desire to punish him severely; after all he was a poor man.

"All right: have it your own way," he said.

Elizabeth thanked him, and presently got to her fishing. He lighted a cigar and watched her. The fishing did not prevent them from talking.

After a while she said: "It's no good: I don't feel a bit shy with you, though you are the duke."

"That's the difference between us. I feel awfully shy with you," he said quickly.

"Shy! *You* shy?" she cried, and laughed.

He was pleased to hear that he did not produce the impression of being shy with her; and he was doubtful whether he ought to regret the fact that he was. After all shyness was becoming to a married man; also it helped to keep him out of mischief.

They spent a very pleasant afternoon; but Elizabeth would not come to tea at the Abbey, declaring that if she came once a week it would be as often as was safe. He walked with her to the bridge, deploring her firmness: and as they were parting he said that it was the more to be deplored since his baccarat party would prevent him from coming out that evening.

"Is Lady Middlemore coming?" she said sharply.

"To tell you the truth, I don't know who's coming and who isn't. That confounded lightning has knocked it clean out of my head."

"You mean you never knew at all who were invited," she said quickly and captiously. "Is Lady Cubbington coming?"

"Oh, yes: she's coming."

"It's perfectly sickening!" she said with some heat. "You pretend to like being with me; and you spend every moment you can get with Lady Middlemore and Lady Cubbington."

"Well, it can't be helped. This party was fixed up before I met you," he said calmly.

"But it's got to be helped!" she cried indignantly. "I'm not going to stand it. If it goes on, I shall just

stop the whole thing; and then you know what will happen."

"Yes: you won't be a duchess," he said calmly.

"And you certainly won't be a duke."

"And would you really inform the police, Elizabeth?" he said sadly.

"How dare you call me Elizabeth?" she cried.

"Well, people who are going to be married generally call each other by their Christian names."

"Going to be married! When you've only known me two or three days!"

"Well, I thought that was the idea," he said somewhat helplessly.

"And you spending all your time with Lady Middlemore and Lady Cubbington!"

"But what do they matter? I can't marry either of them. They're married already," he protested.

"That makes it all the worse," she said with very stern coldness.

"Ah, you're prejudiced," he said.

"I'm nothing of the kind!" she cried.

He shrugged his shoulders and looked patient.

She was silent, gazing at him thoughtfully with puckered brow.

Then she said: "I don't mind Lady Cubbington nearly so much. She's not at all like me."

With that cryptic utterance she left him.

He walked up to the Abbey in a thoughtful content. Women were indeed odd illogical creatures, but it was pleasant that Elizabeth should be jealous of Lady Middlemore. It was certainly a great pity

that he was not really the Duke of Lanchester, and that he was already hampered by a wife. It would have been delightful to take Elizabeth away from Little Lanchester and give her the full life she craved.

He had always been vaguely unsatisfied in the matter of Millicent, but he had never before considered her an actual impediment to the expansion of his spirit.

He wondered whether Elizabeth did or did not believe him to be the duke.

After he had dressed for dinner he bade Jenkinson announce his guests very distinctly, and awaited their coming with very little nervousness. He was growing confident of his power to make the friends of his predecessor accept him: if such intimate friends as Lady Cubbington and Lady Middlemore had failed to perceive with certainty that he was not the duke, it was very unlikely that any one of their circle would discover it. Indeed after he had received the first half-dozen, he was not only at his ease but he was enjoying a pleasant sense of his importance in the world.

He had left everything to Jenkinson and his chef, and everything went smoothly. The Countess of Hapsworth, a subdued American lady of forty, interested in small Pomeranians, sat on his right, Lady Cubbington on his left. She was looking most beautiful, dazzling indeed, and when she pressed his foot under the table he returned the pressure with conviction. He found himself called on to say little; Lady Cubbington and Lady Hapsworth talked all the while with the furious vivacity of schoolgirls. Now and again

he growled a husky phrase; for the rest, he enjoyed his dinner and the beautiful face of Lady Cubbington.

Dinner over, they were not long getting to baccarat. He did not bring with him any of his previous winnings, for he was not playing the game to please himself, but merely to maintain the proper ducal attitude; he brought with him five hundred dollars of the money his predecessor had left in the bureau.

He played cautiously, but with the fortune which had apparently always attended his predecessor, and lost about three hundred dollars. Then his luck turned, and he won about four hundred dollars. Lady Cubbington, who was playing beside him, whispered to him that it would be delightful in the garden; and he was in half a mind to quit the game and go out with her, when he was called on to take the bank. For a moment he hesitated, then he took it, making it five hundred dollars.

For a while he played with varying fortune, then luck set steadily his way, and in half an hour he won nine thousand dollars. It was enough for him. He rose, drank a brandy and soda, lighted a cigar and presently thinking it wiser to humor Lady Cubbington, went with her into the garden. He was in a considerable elation at his success at baccarat, and he found that he had lost his earlier shyness with her. For her part, she seemed more satisfied with him; she said that he was recovering from the lightning, fast becoming his old self. He could not but take credit to himself for the manifest improvement he had made in the art of kissing.

He learned from her that his guests did not expect him to sit up till four in the morning playing baccarat with them; that he might slip away at any time he liked, bidding no one good night, and no one would feel slighted. This easy fashion of entertaining one's guests pleased him: it was indeed different from the almost solemn ceremoniousness of the Christmas parties of his late father-in-law. But before he fell asleep he reflected with some sadness on the oddity of the world: he had kissed Lady Cubbington and Lady Middlemore much more than he really desired; but Elizabeth, whom he desired keenly to kiss, he had not kissed at all.

The next morning at breakfast a fresh pink-cheeked maid waited on him, and he took it that Jenkinson and the footman were sleeping off the late hours of his predecessor's friends. He liked the change. It seemed to him that in the fresh morning a fresh maid was better for the eyes than middle-aged men. He bade her wait on him at breakfast every morning.

He was somewhat annoyed that it was Sunday, for Elizabeth had told him that she must go to church and could by no means come into the park that morning. He thought that it would be pleasant to go to church in order to look at her, but he was doubtful about it. On the one hand it would be a good thing to go to church and be seen by everybody; but on the other hand the late duke might very well have had certain ways of behaving in church which the congregation had studied for years. Any deviation from them would be marked and might set tongues wagging dan-

gerously. Yet it might be the practise of the duke to go every Sunday.

He rang for Tomkins and said to him gloomily: "When did I go to church last?"

"I don't remember, your Grace," said Tomkins in a tone of surprise.

"And I've forgotten too. It doesn't matter," growled James Whitaker yet more gloomily.

He betook himself to the study of Mr. Lamplow's plan for the drainage of Little Lanchester.

He found that Sunday had made no difference in the habits of the late duke; dinner was not, as he had thought likely, in the middle of the day. There was lunch as usual.

He was somewhat taken aback by the arrival of Sir Richard Starton, who had motored over to lunch with him. He welcomed him gloomily, and since he feared lest he should prevent him from meeting Elizbeth in the park in the afternoon, he remained somewhat gloomy in his manner to him. He kept a careful watch on himself that he might make no slip in eating or drinking, but he had little fear that his guest would observe anything.

Indeed, in the middle of the lunch, Sir Richard said: "There's no doubt about it, Lanchester; you're the last of the dukes. You're the only one of them left with the real manner. I was watching you all last night, and not once did I see you smile."

James Whitaker was staring at him in great astonishment; he thought that he must be joking. But he was plainly enough doing nothing of the kind.

"There was nothing to smile at," he growled.

But the tribute pleased him.

"Yes, that's it. That's the right attitude," said Sir Richard in a tone of warm approval. "You're really 'IT.' The only thing is you're living a hundred years too late."

"Am I?" growled James Whitaker yet more gloomily.

"Of course you are. You ought to have lived a hundred years ago. Why, you'd have been the bosom friend of George IV."

George IV was one of the persons in history whom James Whitaker most detested, and with genuine ducal feeling he growled:

"Nothing of the kind! The fellow was a damned tailor!"

"Oh, yes; you *are* the last of the dukes. There's no doubt about it," said his guest, laughing gently.

James Whitaker was much pleased by this tribute to his fitness for the position he was holding. But he wondered why Sir Richard had been moved to make it, whether it was disinterested. It was hard to perceive what motive he could have had for this lavish praise unless it came from his heart. After lunch, indeed, he suggested that they should play picquet for a couple of hours, but he did not seem at all vexed by James Whitaker's refusal to play on the ground that he had not yet recovered his picquet memory. He suggested that they should motor over to Wanstairs and play bridge with the Hapsworths. When James Whitaker rejected this diversion also, he looked at

him with commiserating eyes, said a few sympathetic words and presently motored off to play without him.

James Whitaker was pleased to be left free, and at three o'clock he betook himself to the bridge in the park. He had not waited ten minutes when, to his joy, Elizabeth came. She came in a very pleasant, smiling mood, for she was wearing her prettiest frock and hat. She had wished him to see her at her best.

She did indeed charm him; his heart warmed and warmed to her young loveliness. Had not his air been set and stern and gloomy, she must have seen how profoundly she moved him. As it was she only observed that his eyes were much brighter than she had yet seen them. Once more she thought them very fine eyes.

She was not only charming to his eye, but she was in a charming mood, no longer captious or inclined to raise the matter of Lady Cubbington or Lady Middlemore. His violence to Pittaway the day before had convinced her for the while that he was the duke, though, indeed, she was not letting the matter trouble her. They enjoyed, therefore, a delightful afternoon. She talked much more than he, but he was very sympathetic with her. He abated the husky growl little by little, and spoke in his natural deep but musical voice, and she found it attractive. Of a sudden a sense of intimacy had awakened in their hearts, and for no fresh reason that either of them could have given, they felt drawn more closely together. She was easily persuaded to come to tea on the terrace.

She was talking less about what she would do when

she was duchess, and showing more curiosity about him, how things affected him. There were questions and speculations in her eyes when they rested on him. He found it quite easy to talk to her.

She went away at six, for she had to go to evening service; and she went reluctantly. She promised readily to meet him at nine.

He came back to the Abbey in a very pleasant exaltation. The view from the terrace had a finer beauty, the dishes at dinner, the wine, the cigar were of finer flavor. The beautiful face of Elizabeth kept rising before his eyes, quickening his other pleasures.

He went to their trysting-place in some doubt whether he would find her as charming that night as she had been in the afternoon. But he found that in the light of the moon she was even more charming.

He went to bed very pleased with his day; it had been the ideal day for which he had looked when he had started on his holiday. He was falling asleep when he was fully awakened again by the thought that from Elizabeth to Millicent, from Lanchester Abbey to Hammersmith would be a fall indeed distressing. Then the thought came to him that he might never go back to Millicent and Hammersmith: he had ten thousand dollars. Millicent neither needed nor desired him; and Hammersmith had been but an unkindly city.

CHAPTER XI

HE awoke with the feeling strong in him that the ten thousand dollars he had won at baccarat had indeed changed the world. It had made him a free man; not, indeed, as free as a Duke of Lanchester, but free enough. At any rate, he was no longer bound to the failing business at Hammersmith. All the world was open to him; he could now carry his knowledge and his talents into any sphere where they could find scope.

None the less, it would be very hard to leave the Abbey, or rather, to be exact, it would be very hard to leave Elizabeth. Of course, he would not suffer seriously from seeing her no more, for he had only known her five days, and that could not have given his feeling for her time to take root in any depth of his being. Yet it would be hard to leave her.

After breakfast he sent Mr. Lamplow's plan for the draining of Little Lanchester to him at Lanchester by Hibbert in the racing car, with a note reminding him that the contract was to be ready to sign at six on the Tuesday evening; then he dismissed that matter from his mind. He had nothing to do but enjoy the last two days of his stay.

Therefore, before he went to the park to meet Elizabeth, he sent for Jenkinson, bade him tell the chef

that he had a fancy for an especially good dinner that night, and then questioned him about the rarities in the Abbey cellars. He weighed his statements carefully, and decided to drink '68 Château d'Yquem and '92 Pol Roget with that dinner. Jenkinson suggested a glass of '70 port, Martini's, to drink after dinner, and after a little thought James Whitaker accepted the suggestion with becoming gravity.

He spent the morning in the park watching Elizabeth fish, and he spent the afternoon in the same pleasant occupation. Now and again she rested from her fishing, and they talked. In the evening they only talked; Elizabeth did not fish. All the day and evening they did not fall a-sparring once. This question whether he was, or was not, the duke was not raised; the far graver questions of Lady Cubbington and Lady Middlemore were not once debated. Elizabeth seemed content to try merely to learn more about his personality, to let slip confidences about herself, to let their intimacy deepen.

They lingered over their farewell that night, hesitant, a little confused; and quite suddenly the knowledge came to James Whitaker that he might kiss her. It startled him: he must not kiss her; it was not fair to her—he was a married man. He delayed no longer; he bade her good night, and left her.

He came back to the Abbey a little shaken by his sudden discovery, and not a little exultant. He tried to banish his exultation; he felt that he had no right to it. Of course she could not really be in love with him; she had known him so short a time. He must,

however, have taken her girlish fancy. He had certainly no right to be exultant about it.

He never, for a moment, thought that he might have been mistaken; he knew that he might have kissed her as surely as he knew that he was James Whitaker.

After he had gone to bed and lay thinking of her there came a revulsion. The while his moral sense had the worst of it, and he was filled with an almost violent regret that he had not kissed her. There was no doubt about it; she had taken his fancy no whit less than he had taken hers. They might surely have had the pleasure of a few kisses.

It was a long while before his moral sense got the better of his unhallowed thought, and he perceived clearly and with regret that his domesticated nature was indeed weakening under the pressure of the ducal life.

He awoke to his last day at the Abbey, resolved to enjoy to the full every minute of it. He ate a large breakfast very slowly, for he might never again in his life enjoy a breakfast cooked by so great an artist as the Abbey chef. After it he lighted a cigar with an almost solemn air. At eleven he met Elizabeth and spent the morning with her. A little while before they parted he told her that he was going up to London that evening, and that he might have to stay there some days. She received the news glumly, saying:

"It will be very dull here again."

"It will be much duller for me without you," he said quickly.

His suddenly devouring eyes set her flushing.

After lunch, an excellent lunch, treated with a tender thoroughness, he practised his predecessor's signature for a little while, to be sure that his hand would be in when it came to signing the contract with the builders. Then he ordered Tomkins to pack a portmanteau with everything he should need for three days in London. Tomkins asked if he should come with him, and James Whitaker said that he would not need him.

"By the way, I've quite forgotten where I stay when I'm in London," he growled.

"Your Grace used to stay at Claridge's; but lately you've taken to staying at the Ritz," said the valet.

"All right: forward my letters to the Ritz," said James Whitaker.

The knowledge that it was his last afternoon with Elizabeth weighed on him heavily. It made him eager to lose nothing of the pleasure to be drawn from it, and it informed his attitude to her with a tenderness which for the time being smoothed away his natural roughness. The new sense of intimacy which had sprung to being in them the day before had not weakened; his attitude deepened it.

All the while he was alert to miss no beauty of her changing face and supple figure and delightful voice. He strove to store his mind with memories of her beauty which should remain with him, a lasting refreshment in the dry ways of the world. He was aware that he might well be storing it also with a lasting regret; but of that he was careless.

Elizabeth was susceptible to the new tenderness in

his attitude, the frequent tender inflections of his voice, and she was gentle with him all the time. Now and again a kind of dreary oppression weighed on them, and they fell into silences hard to break.

At half past four he persuaded her to come to tea on the terrace of the Abbey, and she needed but little urging. It was at tea that he observed another change in her: she seemed to have grown older, to have become much more of a woman in the three days which had passed since she had last had tea with him. She still took a healthy interest in the delicate cakes; but she was quieter, even graver, and plainly she was far more interested in him.

After tea he had lighted a cigarette and was watching her as she gazed rather dreamily across the valley of the Wyper, when, of a sudden, the full knowledge of all that he was losing in leaving her came to him with an almost violent shock. It was good, indeed, to have had a splendid holiday, and to be ending it a free man with ten thousand dollars in his pocket; but money and memories profited nothing, if he was passing into a life empty of Elizabeth. A clear glimpse down its dreary vista filled him with a dreadful panic. Presently it left him in a raging bitterness.

Surprised by his sudden scowling gloom, she asked him what was the matter.

"It's going to London—away from you."

"Will you miss me so much as all that?" she said in a tone of great pleasure.

"You can't think how much I shall miss you," he said earnestly.

She wondered for a moment whether he had missed other women as much. She nearly asked him, but the quick desire not to mar this pleasant afternoon checked her.

"It's only for three days," she said in a cheering tone.

He said nothing; he only gazed at her with angry miserable eyes.

"It's very odd that we should be going to miss each other so much when we've only known each other such a little while," she said.

"Odd? It's incredible! I wouldn't have believed it!" he cried.

She flushed and gazed at him with grateful eyes; there was a most flattering sincerity in his tone.

"But you—you must have missed other women just as much," she said.

She was sure he had not; but she wished to hear him say it.

"Other women?" he growled. "There aren't any other women! There never were any."

She breathed a soft sigh of content and gazed at him with eyes more grateful than ever.

He gazed at her somberly, a dull flame in his eyes. Wild ideas kept taking possession of his mind: he would tell her that he was not the Duke of Lanchester, but James Whitaker, furniture-dealer, of Hammersmith; he would tell her that he was married; then he would beg her to come to America with him to start a new life. If she loved him, it would matter little to her whether he were, or were not, the duke.

If she loved him, she would come. He had an odd certain conviction, deep down in his heart, that he could persuade her to come.

But he was silent. It was all so absurd, so unfair to her. He gazed round somewhat wildly; the imposing mass of the Abbey, the beautiful garden, and beautiful, peaceful valley seemed so incongruous with the turmoil in his breast.

Then Jenkinson came through the window of the blue drawing-room, bringing a telegram on a salver.

James Whitaker opened it, scowling. It ran:

"Regret contract can not possibly be ready before three-thirty to-morrow Judson can not complete specifications earlier Lamplow."

Here was a pretty business: either he would have to take his departure leaving the contract unsigned, or he would have to stay and expose himself to the risk of being recognized by Lord Edward Beddard. Which should he do?

His mind was in too great a turmoil for a clear consideration of the matter at the moment; and in any case it was not one to settle out of hand. Then he leaped at the chance of another evening in the park with Elizabeth.

"This settles my going to London to-night," he said. "I must wait and go to-morrow."

"Oh, I'm so glad!" said Elizabeth softly.

He succeeded in putting the question of what he should do about meeting Lord Edward Beddard out

of his mind till he parted with her in the wood on the way to the village. Then he gave all his mind to it.

He might even now spend the evening with her, catch a morning train to London and escape, leaving the contracts unsigned. The drawback to this course was that it might excite the suspicion that he had fled just before Lord Edward Beddard's arrival in order to avoid him. There was indeed no great chance of it; but his flight might have that result. Again it went sorely against the grain to fly so directly from this sponger. To depart the evening before his coming had not gone against the grain, but this definite flight was another matter. He had grown to detest his successor so heartily.

But most of all he was set on signing the contract. All his obstinacy was up in arms at the thought of abandoning his scheme for the improvement of the condition of the perpetual dwellers on the estate. He had a dim thought that it justified his temporary usurpation.

Throughout the dinner he weighed the arguments for and against his going, and as he lighted his cigar he came to the final resolve that he would stay and risk recognition.

He walked briskly across the terrace with his mind at ease. As he came to the top of the steps he saw the lights of a motor-car coming through the distant park gates. He chuckled at his escape. He was nearly at the bridge when it stopped at the Abbey doors.

He came to the bridge and leaned against the parapet, waiting. He told himself that he must be care-

ful not to raise Elizabeth's hopes any higher—for her own sake. He observed with some surprise that in the expectation of her coming his heart was beating quickly. Presently she came, on quicker feet than usual. Her face was clouded, but at the sight of him it cleared.

"I didn't expect to find you here. I saw Lady Cubbington's motor-car," she said quickly.

"It would take a great deal more than Lady Cubbington to keep me away from you," he said quickly, forgetting his intention of not raising her hopes higher.

"But there were four or five people in the car," she said. "And they must know you saw it come through the park."

"I don't care," he said.

"I suppose that's one great advantage of being a duke: you can do as you like, and no one thinks you rude for doing it. If any one else did it, every one would think it awfully rude."

"Oh, they'll amuse one another quite well without me," he said carelessly. "But let's stroll along to our usual nook. It would be just like their cheek to send out a search-party for me."

She came with a little sigh of relief, for she had feared that these unbidden guests had spoiled their evening.

When they came to their nook on the bank of the trout-stream they sat down on turf still warm from the sun, their backs against a bank. But now that they were safe from interruption by a search-party,

they seemed to have but little to say to each other. On this, his last night with her, James Whitaker desired keenly to shine, to leave a final attractive impression of himself on her mind. But an oppression, an intense self-consciousness was on him; he could hardly talk, much less shine. It was annoying, but presently he lost his annoyance in the pleasure of being with her. It was almost enough for him to gaze at her face in the moonlight. Her eyes looked so large and wonderful and mysterious.

Now and again she moved a little uneasily and looked at him with a question in her eyes, as though she were troubled by something he could explain.

Then a craving to touch her came on him; and his hand moved toward hers involuntarily. He drew it sharply back. That would never do. If he once held her hand in his, he would assuredly kiss her, and tell her all she was to him. He must not; it would be grossly unfair. He lighted another cigar hastily. There was no doubt about it: whether he went in the morning or the afternoon of the morrow, go he must —for her sake. Perhaps he had already stayed too long.

Yet he did not think that. At first she would miss him; but she surely would not miss him for long. After all she had only known him a week.

The cigar loosed his tongue a little, and he talked more easily. Now and again the craving to touch her returned; but he kept it under control. They talked fitfully and with an effort of trivial things; they could not help it that their eyes and their tones held a differ-

ent, far more weighty discourse. She did not try to help it.

The church clock, striking eleven, brought Elizabeth to her feet, and he arose with a sigh for the last of his enchanted hours. They took their way slowly to the bridge. He murmured something foolish about the moonlight on the water, and they went on in silence. They crossed the bridge into the wood.

Midway along the path through the wood the uncontrollable impulse seized James Whitaker. They were walking close beside each other, and her shoulder rested for a moment against his arm. The touch broke his resolve; almost against his will he put his arm clumsily around her and drew her to him. She gasped and threw up her hands and pushed at his chest, but with no great vigor. He threw the other arm around her, lifted her off her feet and kissed her.

"Oh, don't, J-J-John—please!" she cried faintly.

But his lips were too thirsty, and he kissed her again and again violently. When he did let her go, she leaned against him, shaken and trembling.

"You are a darling!" he said hoarsely.

"How strong you are—and rough!" she said faintly.

"I couldn't help it," he said penitently. "I felt—as—as—as if I could have eaten you!"

"I felt as if I were being eaten," she said, and laughed faintly.

He put his arm round her again, and she found that he was trembling, even as she was. The discovery thrilled her almost more keenly than his violent kisses.

"It's very odd. I never felt like that in my life be-

fore—never," he said slowly in the accents of the strongest conviction.

"I'm sure I never did," said Elizabeth with no less conviction.

He heaved a great relaxing sigh of pleasure.

"You—you didn't mind? Did you?" he said a little anxiously.

"Oh—yes—no—I don't know."

He bent down and kissed her again gently.

"It was rather thrilling," she confessed.

"I do love you," he said, and felt her quiver to the avowal.

"It seems such a short time to fall in love in—a week," she said, loosing herself, and moving on.

"It seems a lot longer than a week to me. I seem to have moved into a new world altogether since I knew you."

"Well, that's exactly how I feel," she said.

He stopped her to kiss her again, and kept his arm round her when they moved on.

"To think that I thought you weren't the duke!" she said presently.

"Well, it was always possible I wasn't," he said.

She squeezed his arm gently.

"How I did bully you!" she said.

At the end of the wood they lingered; it was hard indeed to part. But when the church clock struck twelve she hurried away.

James Whitaker came back to the Abbey very slowly. His mind was still in a whirl from the emotional explosion which had upturned the very depths of his

being. He was aware that he had beyond measure complicated his already very difficult position; but none the less, his strongest feeling was a great exultation. The future was black enough; but he would not let its blackness trouble him. He abandoned himself to memories of Elizabeth.

They would not let him sleep. It was a long while before his exultation died down; and he began to face the new situation. It was new, wholly new. The sudden violent outburst of his passion had wholly removed their love affair from the region of light loves. He had won from Elizabeth a response to that passion; and he had incurred heavy obligations toward her. He had given her rights beside which he felt the rights of his unloved and unloving wife to be shadowy. To desert her forthwith would be beyond words shameful.

On the other hand, he could not see what he would gain by staying. He could not remain Duke of Lanchester: that was out of the question. He could not marry Elizabeth, at any rate as long as Millicent was alive; and she might live another half century. If ever any one was in a blind alley!

He found some relief in damning Lamplow for his delay about the contracts; and then, ungratefully, he cursed the voluptuous life he had been leading, and the stimulation of Lady Cubbington and Lady Middlemore which had so sapped his domesticated nature as to render him incapable of keeping his resolve to leave the Abbey on the terms, the ostensible terms at any rate, of a mere flirtation with Elizabeth.

CHAPTER XII

WHEN at last he fell asleep he slept soundly enough; but he awoke with his perplexity of the night no whit lessened. It did not spoil his breakfast, though it lessened his enjoyment of it by diverting from it his full attention.

He learned from Jenkinson that Lord Edward Beddard was wont to arrive at the Abbey about noon. That was satisfactory, for it would give him an hour with Elizabeth before the dangerous and possibly fateful meeting. As he was finishing his breakfast, a footman brought a message from Mr. Brinkman asking if he might see him on a matter of importance. He sent word that he would come to him in his office; and after breakfast he went.

Mr. Brinkman rose at his entrance and washed his hands at him as he bade him good morning.

"Good morning. What is it?" growled James Whitaker.

"It's about your racing-stable, your Grace. We arranged, you know, that it should be sold by auction; and I was taking steps to carry out that arrangement. But an opportunity has arisen for selling it by private contract. Sir Otto Bernstein, hearing, I suppose, that you were selling it, has made an offer of two hundred thousand dollars for it, lock, stock and barrel."

This was indeed good news, for in the short time at his disposal James Whitaker had not hoped to be able to get rid of the stable, eager as he was to do so; and he had been sure that his successor would undo any arrangement he might make to sell it by auction. He had made up his mind, therefore, that he must be content with draining and rebuilding Little Lanchester. Now, he could probably make certain of getting rid of the stable too.

But he showed no pleasure at the news; he scowled and said:

"That infernal outsider?"

The breath of opposition stimulated Mr. Brinkman; his little eyes sparkled; his nose reddened; and washing his hands furiously, he grew almost eloquent in urging his employer to accept the offer. He declared that the horses might, at auction, sell for a thousand or two more; but then they were quite as likely to sell for a thousand or two less. In any case, there was no security that they would not fall into the hands of outsiders.

James Whitaker listened to him, scowling; but in the end he let his face clear, and growled:

"All right. Have it your own way. But I don't want a lot of trouble and bother about it. Write a letter accepting the offer at once for me to sign; and then draw up a deed for me to sign when I come in, so that you can put the sale through without bothering me any more about it. Can you do that?"

"Certainly, your Grace, certainly," said Mr. Brinkman, beaming at getting his way.

Forthwith he wrote the letter; and James Whitaker signed it glumly. But as he came out of the office he smiled a smile of great content. He felt that in removing from the turf one of its oldest and most respected patrons he had done it what harm he could. He went to meet Elizabeth in excellent spirits, his coming dangerous meeting with his successor for the while forgotten.

Both he and Elizabeth were at first a little shy, meeting on this lower level of emotion after their exaltation of the night before. But their shyness soon vanished as nearness rekindled the flame. The eyes of Elizabeth were not, indeed, so wonderful and mysterious as they had been in the moonlight; but fine candid eyes, they had their beauty of the day.

He felt bound to kiss her (he must play the part into which his passion had thrust him), and she did not find that the daylight at all lessened the fervor of his lips.

Presently he said, carelessly enough: "I've got to get back by twelve, unfortunately. I'm expecting my brother."

"Is *he* coming to stay at the Abbey?" she said, frowning at the thought of him. "We shan't be able to see so much of each other."

"I shan't let him interfere with us," he said firmly.

She smiled; and then she said: "How terrified you'd be, if you weren't really the duke!"

"Oh, for anything you know, my heart may be in my boots."

"It isn't. I can feel it beating," she said confidently.

"It's your own you feel," he said.

In truth it was difficult to distinguish their heart-beats, so close together were they sitting.

He had no doubt that he had wholly cleared her mind of any doubt that he was the duke. He felt bound to pretend to himself that he wished he had not, for had she continued to doubt she might not have let herself grow so fond of him. In truth, he would not on any account have had her less fond.

They parted, reluctantly, at a few minutes past twelve; and he walked slowly up to the Abbey, bracing himself for the meeting with his detested successor. He had a foreboding that it would not go well, that his luck had been too good to last; and the thought of trouble from Lord Edward Beddard set him scowling very darkly. It was not only that he had to give up to him this pleasant life; but he was the man who had tried to kiss Elizabeth, who might even, when he had gone, try to marry her. He detested him even more heartily on this account than he detested him for ousting him from his dukedom. He came on to the terrace not so much ready as eager for the struggle, his combative spirit on edge. He would not merely bluff his opponent out: if he were too annoying, he would give him the hammering of a lifetime. To think that the blackguard had tried to kiss Elizabeth!

He came on to the terrace before the Abbey, frowning, hunched together, with the air almost of a beast crouching to spring. He walked toward the big doors and had almost reached them, when a voice called

"Hallo, John!" from the dining-room, and a man came out of one of the long windows, carrying a tumbler in one hand and a cigar in the other.

"How are you, old chap?" he said in a gurgling oily voice; and he put the cigar in his mouth and held out his hand.

"How are you?" growled James Whitaker, gazing at him with all his eyes.

He saw a very thick-set, bull-necked man, a little shorter than himself, black-haired, with brown eyes to which the bloodshot whites gave a reddish hue, with thick fleshy lips, parted as if he were afflicted by adenoids, and with a heavy jowl.

With something of a shock he knew that, somewhere or other (he could not remember where) he had seen that repulsive face before.

"You don't look very cheery," said Lord Edward Beddard with a gurgling chuckle; and he pressed James Whitaker's limp hand with a fat soft hand, unpleasantly hot and dry.

"How are you after being struck by lightning?" he went on in a tone of resolute pleasantness. "I read about it in the papers, and I gathered that you must have had a devilish narrow shave. But I met Berkeley; and he told me that he had been playing baccarat with you at the Cubbingtons' and you were as right as rain."

"He was wrong, then," growled James Whitaker. "My right arm is still stiff and so are my talking muscles; and I never know what I'm going to remember and what I'm not."

As he was speaking he saw a look of perplexity come into Lord Edward's face, the very look which had come into the face of Lady Middlemore; and he braced himself.

Lord Edward bent forward, peering at him. James Whitaker affected to perceive nothing, turned to the left and began to stroll along the front of the Abbey. Lord Edward kept pace with him, staring at him sidewise. Mechanically he raised the glass he was carrying to his lips, drained it and stared again.

James Whitaker said nothing. The searching eyes gave him the unpleasant sensation that they were boring through the mask of his flesh to the man beneath. He bent all his energy to keeping his face impassive, unconcerned, unaware. He felt that he was succeeding with his face: it was rigid: but that his eyes were not so well under control. His eyelids flickered; and then they flickered again.

"My—my—goodness!" said Lord Edward Beddard faintly.

James Whitaker strolled on, still impassive, and turned the corner of the Abbey. Lord Edward Beddard dropped the glass, gripped his arm and said thickly:

"Here—I say!"

James Whitaker turned and met the gaze of his excited, burning eyes full and square. There was a dull dangerous glow in his own.

"What's the matter?" he growled; and he shook the fat hand from his arm very roughly.

"The matter, by God!" cried Lord Edward Beddard

in a high wheezy voice. "Why—why—it isn't Lanchester! You're not Lanchester at all!"

"You're drunk," growled James Whitaker; and intent as he was on the matter in hand, he heard a window pushed up near them.

"Drunk be damned! You're not Lanchester! You're an impostor! Damn it! I know! I know! You're that damned broker!"

On his words the vision of a sale at Christie's rose before James Whitaker's mind, and the face of the ugly red-faced brute who had stared and stared at him. That ugly red-faced brute was Lord Edward Beddard.

With this discovery came the realization of the extent of his danger: here was a man who could point the way to the duke's double, to James Whitaker.

"If you're not drunk, you're mad," he growled, and he thrust his fierce scowling face forward into that of Lord Edward Beddard. He had to thrust his hands deeper into his pockets not to hit it.

"M-m-mad? D-d-drunk?" wheezed Lord Edward Beddard, and he drew sharply back from that savage mask. "I—I—I'll damned well show you, you infernal impostor!"

His crimson face was working wildly as wonder and rage and joy chased one another across it.

"You *are* drunk!" cried James Whitaker.

Lord Edward Beddard coughed oddly, and James Whitaker's glaring eyes saw a darker, purple stain ousting the crimson from his face, as he clutched at his head with both hands; his blood-shot eyes rolled in their

sockets, and then stuck with only the whites showing; he uttered another snorting cough, staggered jerkily in a half circle, fell heavily on his back, writhed for perhaps ten seconds, and lay still, snoring stertorously.

James Whitaker stood and stared down at him blankly, utterly taken aback. Then he recovered, dropped on one knee, and unfastened slowly, with bungling fingers, the fallen man's collar and shirt. It did not ease the stertorous snoring.

James Whitaker gazed round helplessly and saw, at the open window of his office twenty yards away, Mr. Brinkman staring with parted lips. On the instant it flashed on him that the steward had heard every word they had uttered! But he roared at him:

"Don't stand staring there like a stuck pig! Fetch Jenkinson! Send a footman for Doctor Arbuthnot! Get on, you blockhead! Every minute may be precious!"

Mr. Brinkman disappeared from the window; James Whitaker rose and stared down on his stricken adversary. He did not know what to do; he was overwhelmed by surprise at this ending of their interview. Then Jenkinson and a footman came, running.

Jenkinson stopped, bent down, looked at the snoring man and cried:

"It's come, your Grace! Your Grace always said it would!"

"What's come?" growled James Whitaker.

"Apoplexy, your Grace. Just like his poor grandfather—only so much younger."

"Well, hurry up! Don't stand jabbering there! Get him to bed! Have you sent for the doctor?"

"Mr. Brinkman's sending Taylor for him, your Grace."

On his words the steward came panting round the corner of the building. His face was flushed, his eyes were sparkling. He had nothing of the air of a man whose employer's brother had just been stricken with apoplexy under his eyes. It was plain to James Whitaker that not only had he heard what they had said, but that he had fully grasped its importance; that even now he was reckoning the advantages to be drawn from it.

"Fetch a couple of gardeners, Mr. Brinkman! Be sharp!" he growled at him.

For a breath the steward hesitated; then he went.

They soon carried Lord Edward Beddard, still snoring stertorously, to a bedroom, and Jenkinson and Tomkins set about undressing him. James Whitaker left them to it. As he went down the stairs he met Doctor Arbuthnot hurrying up them.

"Jenkinson says it's apoplexy," he said.

"I always expected it!" cried the doctor, hurrying on.

James Whitaker went down into the garden (he felt that he needed plenty of air) and walked up and down considering this change in the situation. It had become so much more dangerous since Lord Edward Beddard had seen him at Christie's. The police would have little difficulty in tracing him to his Hammersmith shop; they would only have to show the late Duke

of Lanchester's portrait to one of the clerks at Christie's. His dealings with the firm had not been extensive, but there had been dealings enough in the days when he was buying for his father-in-law.

Then there was the matter of Brinkman. He did not know what to expect from that little ferret. Probably he would help Lord Edward Beddard; indeed, it was almost certain that he would—unless he could see his way to making a greater profit by helping him retain the title and estates. That did not matter since he did not propose to retain them. He must give all his mind to devising some means of escaping safely.

He fixed his mind on the discovering of those means, and walked up and down, frowning deeply as he cudgeled his brains. At the end of a quarter of an hour of absorbed concentration on the matter, he was beginning to see that he must not only leave England, but that he must grow a beard and mustache to disguise himself; and he wished that the upper part of his face were more commonplace. A beard and mustache were hardly disguise enough for him. Then Doctor Arbuthnot came out of the Abbey, wearing a very grave air.

As he drew near James Whitaker, he shook his head, and said in a very mournful tone: "I'm afraid I can give you no hope, your Grace. It's only a matter of hours."

"Good God! You don't mean that!" cried James Whitaker in unaffected astonishment.

Oddly enough, it had not occurred to him that Lord Edward Beddard's stroke might prove fatal.

"I do. It's only a matter of hours, as I say."

James Whitaker stared at him, weighing this new development, a dozen ideas thronging his mind.

"Will he recover consciousness?" he said.

"Not a chance of it," said Doctor Arbuthnot with conviction.

"Then we shan't know his last wishes, or anything," said James Whitaker, concealing his immense relief at this grateful news.

"No. But I was thinking that your Grace might like a second opinion."

"No—no. But yes—it's always more satisfactory. Will you send Hibbert to Lanchester for some one? You know the best man to have."

"Doctor Marriott," said Doctor Arbuthnot.

He went very briskly to despatch the car.

He left James Whitaker somewhat shocked by this intervention of death in his affairs. He could not, indeed, feel grieved at hearing that Lord Edward Beddard was doomed; but after all it was such a little while since this wretched man was enjoying that cigar and that whisky and soda with so plain and full-blooded an enjoyment.

He pondered the curious fact that his coming into contact with the members of the family had been, as it were, the signal for their death. Truly the coincidence was indeed odd; the kind of coincidence which would give a dabbler in the occult food for endless speculation. Millicent, for example, would never tire of discussing it, should she hear of it. He would take care that she never did. Such coincidences,

not a whit dissimilar really, for all that they were less startling, were always occurring. Yet he could not but feel that it looked as if Providence were bent on thrusting him into the position of Duke of Lanchester.

He paced restlessly up and down the lawn, considering the new situation. Then he went up to his smoking-room and tried to sit quietly and smoke. He could not: Lord Edward Beddard's purple face kept rising before his mind, keeping his nerves on edge. Then he bethought himself that he had instructed Brinkman to draw up a deed selling the racing-stable, and wondered whether he had carried out the instruction. Then he thought that it would be a diversion to go to Brinkman and learn what his attitude was. Now that Lord Edward Beddard could never put any one in the way of tracing him to the Hammersmith shop he had little fear of the steward.

When he came into the office Mr. Brinkman gazed up at him with a startled air, and did not, as was his custom, rise and wash his hands at him. Then his eyes filled with a challenge.

"That deed?" growled James Whitaker. "Is it finished?"

The steward tried to meet his lowering eyes, but could not.

"I—I began it. B-b-but I didn't go on."

"Why not?" growled James Whitaker.

"I d-d-didn't know whether it would b-b-be wanted after all."

"Why shouldn't it be wanted?" growled James Whitaker in a very threatening tone.

"I d-d-didn't know. I thought—Lord Edward b-b-being so ill," stammered the steward.

He had grown somewhat pale under James Whitaker's menacing glare.

"What business have you to think?" roared James Whitaker. "Get on with it at once!"

The steward jumped in his chair and muttered: "Very well, your—very well!"

James Whitaker glowered at him fiercely for half a minute, then went out of the office, slamming the door behind him. There was now no reason to make haste to sell the racing-stable, but he wished to make it quite clear to Brinkman that if he proposed to make trouble on the strength of what he had overheard he would not find him shrinking from it.

He had, indeed, shaken the steward. He left him almost inclined to disbelieve his ears, sure as he was that he had heard Lord Edward Beddard call the duke a damned impostor. Before he had opened it wider the window of his office had been open; and he had lost scarcely a word of their talk. Moreover, he had been pondering the matter with all his mind since he had come back from helping to carry the stricken man up to his bedroom, and he perceived that many circumstances manifestly bore out Lord Edward Beddard's assertion: the pseudo-duke's pretended loss of memory, the amazing change, far beyond the power of any lightning-stroke, in his character; his sudden interest in the laborers on the estate; his equally sudden loss of interest in the turf shown by his determination to sell the racing-stable.

No: no lightning-stroke could have so changed the duke. . . . His love of racing had been fully as great as his dislike of the agricultural laborer. The steward felt that he must have been blind not to have perceived this amazing fraud before Lord Edward Beddard opened his eyes to it.

But the likeness. . . . The extraordinary likeness in face, and figure, and manner, in everything but voice. . . . Of course! That hoarse growling voice, that pretense that the throat muscles were stiff. . . . That was another damning fact. . . . It must have been from the man's voice that Lord Edward Beddard had recognized that he was not the duke. . . . He ought to have recognized it too. . . . And not only the stiffness of the throat muscles, but also the stiffness of the right arm. . . . The duke had not mounted a horse or touched a billiard cue since the lightning-stroke!

But who was the man? . . . Lord Edward Beddard had recognized him. . . . He had recognized him as a stockbroker. . . . There was some family mystery here. . . . Yes; the fellow was a brother of the duke and Lord Edward. . . . On the wrong side of the blanket. . . . That must be it. . . . That would explain the likeness. . . . The duke's father must have bought him a seat on the Stock Exchange. . . . That was where he must seek for traces of him and learn who he was. . . . Doubtless the duke had known about him as well as Lord Edward Beddard.

But where *was* the duke? . . . Surely he had

not disappeared of his own free will. . . . It was the last thing he was likely to do. . . . He had always shown the strongest sense of his importance as Duke of Lanchester. . . . There must have been foul play. . . . This illegitimate stockbroker must have made away with the duke. . . . But how and where?

Mr. Brinkman was trying to recall exactly the events of the day on which the duke had been struck by lightning, when James Whitaker descended on him and hectored him into finishing drawing up the deed. As he did it he struggled to get clearly in his mind all the facts he had heard about the duke's lightning-stroke. James Whitaker's behavior had confirmed him in his belief that if he was not the duke, he was undoubtedly his brother, an unscrupulous, ferocious and illegitimate stockbroker. But he could have wished that the confirmation had come in gentler guise: James Whitaker's care-free brutality had indeed stamped him as a man with whom it was dangerous to meddle. But Mr. Brinkman had recognized that danger earlier, and in spite of it he congratulated himself on the fortunate interposition of Providence which had caused him to overhear that pregnant conversation just before apoplexy closed forever the lips of Lord Edward Beddard.

But where was the duke? Or rather where was the duke's body? Where had this brutal and ferocious stockbroker concealed it when he made away with him?

CHAPTER XIII

JAMES WHITAKER came to his lunch filled with the comfortable conviction that in treating him like a dog he had found the right attitude toward Brinkman. He was therefore eating his *oeufs en cocotte* with a natural high satisfaction, when he remembered the condition of Lord Edward Beddard, and at once felt that he ought not to be enjoying his lunch with that unfortunate man dying on the floor above him, that at such a juncture, indeed, enjoyment of any kind was unseemly. But his appetite was in such a healthy state that he found it quite impossible not to enjoy his lunch, and was forced to content himself with assuming an appropriate, mournful air, like that which Jenkinson was wearing. Now and again, remembering the character of the late duke, he deliberately made it less mournful, for he feared lest he might overdo it.

He was smoking a Corona after lunch with his usual satisfaction, since he had come to the conclusion that he had no control over his palate, when Mr. Lamplow and Judson, the Lanchester builder, arrived with the contract for draining and rebuilding Little Lanchester. He told Jenkinson to take them to the steward's office, and there he read, discussed, approved and signed the

contract. Then he bade them draw up like contracts for draining and rebuilding Wodden, Chigleigh and Gant. They took their leave with faces beaming at the prospect of so much work.

It had not escaped James Whitaker's notice that Brinkman had been very gloomy throughout the whole proceeding, that he had actually squirmed at the order for more contracts, and that he was gloomy still. He thought it an excellent occasion to treat him once more like a dog.

"Well, we're getting on," he said in a tone of gratification. "With four model villages on the estate, the laborers will be better off than they have been for generations."

Mr. Brinkman's frown was almost a scowl, and he said in a very sour tone: "If you think you're going to get any thanks from them—"

"I don't," growled James Whitaker. "If I get any thanks from any one, it will be from their grandchildren."

Mr. Brinkman's eyes opened wide, and James Whitaker saw that he had shown more knowledge, or more intelligence, than his predecessor had possessed.

"At any rate, the newspapers say that when you improve the condition of the laborer you improve the quality of his work," he said.

"Yes! But who for?" cried the steward bitterly. "For the tenants—not for—for—us!"

James Whitaker marked that he had avoided saying that he was not improving it for himself, and he also marked that he had not once uttered the words

"Your Grace"—words which had been wont to come from his lips with a frequency quite needless.

But he said quietly: "Well, we can always raise the rents, if we think it fair."

"You'll find yourself unpopular enough without doing that. There isn't a landowner in the county who won't resent these improvements."

"Oh, there must be some who house their laborers decently," said James Whitaker.

"Not on this side of the county!" snapped the steward. Then, correcting himself, he added hastily: "Decently: yes. They house them as they've been housed for generations. But they don't build extravagant model cottages for them. It's just waste."

"Then it's time that some one set them an example," said James Whitaker carelessly; then, frowning at the steward, he growled: "It's a devilish odd thing how a man in your position always tries to keep the wretched beggars down."

"I want to keep them in their place—the place they're fitted for," cried Mr. Brinkman in a somewhat lofty tone.

"You want to keep them in pig-sties, you mean," growled James Whitaker. "Anyhow, it's a good thing that the two hundred thousand for that racing-stable gives me plenty of money to make the improvements, and something over."

As he expected, the steward flamed up and cried even more hotly: "Selling the stable won't mend matters! It'll make the county more furious than ever!"

"The county can burst itself if it likes," said James Whitaker scornfully.

"It's all very well to talk like that, but look at the loss of prestige!" cried the steward. "The Dukes of Lanchester have always been English country gentlemen—leaders of sport—sound Tories—dead against newfangled ideas! The county won't stand these changes."

"Did you ever know me to give a damn for the county?" growled James Whitaker scornfully.

Mr. Brinkman was taken aback. As a matter of fact, as James Whitaker had hoped when he said it, the late duke never had given a damn for the county, and he had made no secret of that fact.

"It won't stand it—you know it won't," said Mr. Brinkman weakly.

"But what's it going to *do* about it?" growled James Whitaker.

Mr. Brinkman gazed at him rather helplessly, opened his mouth and shut it again.

"You're all wrong about the county," growled James Whitaker. "It won't care. You stick at the Abbey here and you never learn anything. The county has stopped caring about that kind of thing. All it cares about is amusing itself."

As soon as he had uttered the words he was surprised at himself. They were the final expression, the summing-up of the impressions Lady Cubbington and her circle had made on him; and now that he had pronounced it he believed it to be a very sound and accurate judgment of their attitude to life.

"Oh, yes: those with investments bringing in big incomes, and those who let their places are like that. But I'm not talking about them. I'm talking about those whose incomes come from the land, and are ever so much smaller than they used to be. They'll resent these cottages bitterly—you'll see," said the steward.

"The backwoodsmen!" sneered James Whitaker. "What do they matter to me?"

Again Mr. Brinkman was taken aback. The words and the air were in the manner of the duke; only the voice was rougher and harsher. But he could not believe that it was the duke, and he said in a tone of bitter irritation:

"Well, I've warned you. You'll destroy the prestige of the family for the next ten years."

James Whitaker could not permit that tone. Indeed, he had brought the steward to the point where he wanted him. He stepped nearer to him, and leaning forward, almost over him, he roared:

"What the devil do you mean by throwing cold water on my hobbies? Do you think I pay an infernal, little pettifogging whippersnapper like you to put obstacles in the way of my doing what I want to?"

At the sudden roaring violence Mr. Brinkman paled and began to tremble. It shook his nerves.

"N-n-no. Of c-c-course not!" he stammered.

"Then just drop it!" roared James Whitaker, yet more loudly.

Mr. Brinkman only gasped. James Whitaker glowered down on him.

"You keep your place!" he roared again.

"Y-y-yes, your Grace!" squeaked Mr. Brinkman.

James Whitaker glowered down at him for half a minute. Then he went slowly out of the office. The "your Grace" pleased him. He had certainly brought Mr. Brinkman where he wanted him—at any rate for the time being. But he did not underrate the seriousness of Mr. Brinkman's discovery. He did not fear him so long as he was at the Abbey, for he felt that the steward was not quite sure that he was not the duke; and he could always bully him into abjectness. But once he disappeared, the steward would be sure; and he would set inquiries afoot. Who could say where they would stop? He had a very unpleasant, uneasy feeling that he was trapped.

When he had slammed the door behind him, Mr. Brinkman put his elbows on his desk, laid his face on his hands and nearly wept. This sudden horrible violence had indeed shaken him. It was quite in the manner of the duke; but he would not believe that it was the duke. He was convinced that it was a ferocious and illegitimate stockbroker, near akin to the duke.

If only he could find proof of it! There was a fortune in it. And the proof must be somewhere to be found. There was, indeed, clearly a double line of proof; he must find the duke's body, and he must establish this pseudo-duke's identity with a stockbroker who had lately disappeared from his usual haunts.

With regard to the duke's body, it was probably in the wood. The story of his supplanter had been that

he had been struck by lightning in the wood. There he had evidently met and murdered and buried the duke. Mr. Brinkman entertained no doubt whatever that he had murdered him: a man of that violent ferocity would not stick at murder. He must search the wood.

It should not, on the other hand, be difficult to establish the identity of the supplanter with a vanished stockbroker. Four days in the city of London with the duke's photograph would do that.

Mr. Brinkman's spirit began to burn higher within him. Here was El Dorado within a mile of him. He shut his desk, put on his straw hat and set out for the wood.

James Whitaker soon lost the satisfaction with which he had come out of the office in a faint annoyance. He had been unaware that while he had the proper contempt for the obsequiousness of Brinkman, it had none the less been pleasant and soothing to him; and he missed it. It grew clearer and clearer to him that the steward was, for all his cowardice, a difficulty and a danger. It was clear that he could not now leave the Abbey till after the funeral of his brother. He began to think that it would not be safe to leave it till he had somehow or other (he could not at all see how) drawn Brinkman's sting.

For a while he walked about the gardens; then he went to the library and tried to read. He found that he could not keep his mind on a book. The knowledge that Lord Edward Beddard was dying oppressed him; but he was chiefly restless because he wanted to be

with Elizabeth. Yet he felt strongly that it would be in the highest degree indecorous that the Duke of Lanchester should be philandering with a pretty girl on the banks of a beautiful stream while his brother lay dying in the Abbey. He felt also that in the actual circumstances the decorous was rather silly. But it was nearly four o'clock. If Elizabeth had come, as usual, at three, on the chance of his meeting her at the bridge, she had gone back home long since.

But she was unlikely to have come. She was sure to have heard of Lord Edward Beddard's apoplectic seizure, and would not expect him. He felt that he ought to feel less annoyed at being kept from her, and more kindly to the dying man whom he had so successfully supplanted. But he could not. The fact that the dying man had tried to kiss Elizabeth was very present in his mind; and he still disliked him heartily.

The hours dragged. Twice he sent Jenkinson to inquire whether there were any change for the better in the sick man's condition. There was not. He tried not to feel thankful to hear it. Also he tried not to enjoy his dinner. He failed.

After dinner he went out into the moonlit gardens, and presently, by no definite act of will, he found himself on the bridge in the park.

Elizabeth was not there; but having come so far, it seemed rather foolish not to go on, and he crossed the bridge and on the other side turned and strolled along the path in the direction of the village. He had come nearly to the end of the wood, when he turned a corner and met Elizabeth.

They greeted each other with a thrill of joyful excitement which found expression in their tones.

Then she said: "I didn't think you'd come—with your brother so ill. And then I thought you might."

"There's no point in my waiting at the Abbey. He's unconscious, and it's most improbable that he will become conscious. All the same, it might shock people to hear that I had been seen enjoying your society while he was so ill. Isn't there some retired nook in this wood where we could talk without shocking any one?"

"Oh, yes; there's one quite close. But no one ever comes into the wood. They're much too afraid of you. It's only a path to the Abbey, you know."

"Never mind, let's go to the nook; a servant might come along—or a gamekeeper."

"Very well," she said, and presently she turned into a narrow side-path, about sixty yards from the bridge.

She led the way, and about fifty yards deep in the wood the path ended in a little turf-covered dell. It was so small that only in the middle of it was the moonlit sky visible, through a hole, about ten feet across and sixty feet above their heads, in the thick foliage.

When she stopped in the middle of the dell and faced him he promptly caught her up and kissed her.

"Oh, you are so violent!" she said with a soft uncertain laugh.

"You'd make anybody violent," he said with conviction.

He found that the grass was dry, and they sat down

at the foot of an oak. He put his arm round her and drew her very close to him. They were too much in the shadow to please him: he could not see her face clearly enough. But he endured it, since no gamekeeper on his rounds, even if he saw them at all, could in that deep shadow see how close they were together.

For a while they were silent save for now and again a murmur of endearment from him. They felt almost under a spell, either intensely aware of the other's nearness. The dark wood, the silence only broken by the faint sounds of the woodland at night, made them feel extraordinarily alone together out of the world.

Presently she drew a little away from him, and said in a somewhat uncertain voice: "It's—it's sad about your brother. It must have been a shock."

"Oh, yes," he said, in a somewhat indifferent tone.

"He's the only close relation you have, isn't he?" she said.

"Yes," he said.

"That must make it so much worse," she said.

He felt a real need on him not to make any more pretenses to her than were forced on him, and he said:

"Well, as a matter of fact, it doesn't hit me very hard. You see we haven't seen much of each other for years."

"But you were boys together," she said gravely.

"That was a long while ago," he said quickly.

"Of course," she said.

They were silent a while, then he drew her closer again, and said:

"The fact is I can't think of any one or anything but you."

"Can't you? Not really?" she said softly.

"No, I can't. Whether I'm with you or away from you, I can't think of anything else. I didn't know that any one could absorb some one else like that. There isn't anything of real interest anywhere in the world, except you."

She thrilled to the genuine fervor of his tone. There was no disbelieving it.

"I—I feel rather like that," she said softly.

He threw his other arm round her and strained her to him.

They stayed in the dell till the church clock struck eleven. Then, after a lingering good-by at the end of the little path and after arranging to meet there at eleven the next morning, they went their different ways.

James Whitaker walked back to the Abbey with both his conscience and intelligence in abeyance as far as Elizabeth was concerned. He was too deeply moved to think with any clearness; and when his conscience tried to raise its still small voice, he refused to face his actions and their probable results. He desired only to be with her as often and as long as possible; and he desired it with an overmastering vehemence which prevented in him all regard for its wisdom or propriety. He was, for the time being, removed from the intellectual and moral spheres wholly into the emotional.

He came into the Abbey feeling really grateful to

Lord Edward Beddard for having, by his apoplectic seizure, rendered it out of the question for him to disappear yet a while, and so forced him to enjoy more of the society of Elizabeth. This sense of gratitude made the visit to the sick-room, which he thought advisable, less irksome.

He found that Doctor Arbuthnot, with a due sense of his patient's social prominence, had procured two nurses for him. They were manifestly impressed by the presence of a duke in the sick-room. Both of them, with decorous mournfulness, assured him that their patient would not live many hours. They said that Doctor Arbuthnot had been twice that evening and was coming again at about twelve to spend the rest of the night with him. James Whitaker could not perceive any change in the sick man: the face was still darkly flushed; the monotonous snoring seemed to him neither louder nor softer, faster nor slower than it had been. He stood gazing down at him in a frowning gloom, and the nurses watched his troubled face with sympathetic eyes as he pondered whether it was worth while spending the night in the sick-room and sharing Doctor Arbuthnot's disagreeable vigil. On the whole it seemed better not to do so: the action would probably be out of keeping with his predecessor's character and set tongues needlessly wagging. He wished all possible attention to be centered on the unfortunate Lord Edward Beddard, as little as possible diverted to himself. He shook his head gloomily, bade the nurses good night and went to bed.

When Tomkins awoke him next morning he in-

formed him, with decorous mournfulness, that Lord Edward Beddard had died at sunrise. James Whitaker said nothing; he frowned gloomily and continued to frown gloomily while he dressed and was shaved. With the same gloomy frown he listened during his breakfast to the sympathetic lamentations of Jenkinson.

After breakfast he betook himself to the library and after a short search through the letter-files, discovered that his family lawyers were Messrs. Blenkinsop and Tudor, of Lincoln's Inn Fields. He tried to learn from Debrett who was now the heir to the dukedom, or, to be exact, who was now the rightful Duke of Lanchester, but failed.

He rang for Jenkinson and said to him: "I suppose the lawyers had better arrange the funeral and send out the invitations."

"Well, your Grace, Plunkett and Crewson, the undertakers at Lanchester, generally attend to all that. Mr. Brinkman helps them."

"I'd forgotten," said James Whitaker. He paused with an air of thoughtful consideration, then continued: "I suppose they'll have to invite my heir."

"The Earl of Fleetham will certainly have to be invited to the funeral, your Grace," said Jenkinson quickly. Then he coughed apologetically and added: "But after—after that—that—dispute with your Grace, I don't suppose he'll come."

"Well, it doesn't matter," growled James Whitaker. "Send Mr. Brinkman up to my smoking-room."

He went up to it himself, and had scarcely dis-

posed himself at ease in a deep saddle-back chair when the steward came.

He entered with an uneasy furtive air, and stood still before James Whitaker, looking half timorous, half defiant. His appearance was pleasing to James Whitaker, and he surveyed him with a faint mocking smile. Mr. Brinkman shuffled his feet and tried vainly to meet his eye.

"Have you written to those Lanchester people—what are their names?—Plunkett and Crewson, to arrange the funeral?" said James Whitaker.

"Not yet," said the steward sulkily.

"Then why haven't you?" suddenly roared James Whitaker in a voice which made Mr. Brinkman jump.

"I—I—was g-g-going to," he stuttered.

"And don't forget to tell them to invite that damned Fleetham—not that he'll come."

"Of c-c-course, your G-G—of course."

"Have you wired the news to Blenkinsop and Tudor?"

"N-n-not yet."

"Then what the devil have you been doing?" roared James Whitaker.

"It's only half p-p-past t-ten," stammered the steward.

"Well, get on to it! And be quick about it!"

"Are they to invite everybody who might be expected to be asked?" said Mr. Brinkman with a sudden eagerness.

James Whitaker saw it and wondered what was the meaning of it.

"Of course. Why not?" he said.

Mr. Brinkman's face fell: he had been expecting that he would shrink from publicity. He felt certain enough that James Whitaker was not the duke; but he was ready enough to have his certainty strengthened as often and in as many ways as possible. He gazed at him viciously.

"What the devil are you standing there idling for?" roared James Whitaker more loudly than ever.

Mr. Brinkman again jumped, muttered something about waiting for further instructions, and slunk out of the room. In his office he found himself trembling so violently that he had to rewrite his telegram to the lawyers. When he had written the letter to Plunkett and Crewson, and arranged that a groom should at once ride with it to Lanchester, he rested his face on his hands and resumed the process of cudgeling his brains for the clue to the El Dorado on the floor above him.

He cudgeled them, however, with a rather less hopeful eagerness than the day before. He had been shaken by the patness with which the names of the undertakers, the lawyers and the heir had come from James Whitaker's tongue. He might, indeed, have learned them from Tomkins or Jenkinson in casual talk without their dreaming that they were telling him things of which he was ignorant. But he had spoken of them with a familiarity which was discomfiting.

Mr. Brinkman ground his teeth. He could not be wrong. He must find the clue to the mystery. He would search every inch of the wood.

James Whitaker walked down to the bridge aflame with eagerness to be with Elizabeth again. He was surprised by the vehemence of this perpetual desire to be with her; never in his life before had he desired anything with such vehemence. It was true that never in his life before had he known any one so charming and delightful as Elizabeth. But that fact did not, to his thinking, account for all the vehemence of his desire. He suspected that living luxuriously in this freedom from care was strengthening him emotionally as well as physically. The change was pleasing to him.

He was a little early at the trysting-place, but he found Elizabeth already in the dell, and as she rose, flushing and smiling, to welcome him, he found her more ravishing than ever.

They talked more in the daylight than they had the night before—about the death of Lord Edward Beddard, and his funeral; about the rebuilding of the village and the hamlets. She was able to inform him that the villagers were looking forward to the change, some with doubt merely, others with resentment. Owing to the weeding effect of the neighboring town of Lanchester, there was hardly any one left in the village of sufficient intelligence to look forward with any pleasure to dwelling in a roomier cottage.

"Well, I suppose the idea is to make the place fit for the more intelligent people to live in. At least, I read something like that somewhere: perhaps it was in *The Times*," he said with an air of vagueness.

"Oh, you'll never do that," said Elizabeth. "The intelligent ones, young men and young women, are

like me: they can't stand the dulness. All you will really do will be to keep the children healthier."

"At any rate, they'll have decent baths," said James Whitaker.

"Baths!" cried Elizabeth. "Well, you'll have to make a very strict rule that they're not to keep coal, or onions, or potatoes in them; and you'll have to get papa to see that they keep it. But that's as near as they'll go to having baths."

"How would it be if I were to offer a prize for the cleanest child?"

"It would be a horrid—cruel thing to do!" cried Elizabeth. "Why, they'd scrub the skin off the children!"

"It looks as if the improvements were going to be rather wasted," he said somewhat gloomily.

"Oh, no; they won't," she said hastily. "It will be much healthier for the children. And, of course, papa will badger some of them into taking baths, and I will talk to the elder girls about the pleasure of it. After all, a certain number of them will take baths—in summer."

"Well, as long as you're satisfied, I am. The whole business of improving the places was your idea," he said carelessly.

She flushed with pleasure.

CHAPTER XIV

MR. BRINKMAN cudgeled his brains vainly for half an hour, then he resolved on action. He walked briskly across the park to the bridge, and on it he paused and considered the home wood. In it the impostor professed to have been struck by lightning, and the indignant steward proposed to search its surface for the signs of a newly-made grave, and to examine all natural holes and nooks such as hollow trees and pools, and the little-used quarry and saw-pit.

He knew the wood, or, rather, parts of it, for in the summer he had often strolled through it, and he began by searching out-of-the-way parts of it where a man would be most likely to hide a dead body. That very nearly brought him to the dell in which James Whitaker and Elizabeth were talking. But it occurred to him that the impostor, being a stranger, would not know the spots convenient for making away with the duke and burying his body; he would take him where he found him and deal with him there. Therefore it was no use searching for the grave or the corpse only in the likely places; he must search the whole wood. He forthwith mapped it out, in his mind, into sections, walked across it, and began to search that section of it along which the highroad ran. That spared James Whitaker and Elizabeth his intrusion.

He searched rather more than an acre of it before lunch, and in the evening he searched another acre. Several times, with a heart that beat high, he believed himself about to discover the body of the duke, but found that he had been misled by a dead rabbit.

The Abbey was quieter than ever, now that Lord Edward Beddard lay dead in it. James Whitaker did not find him at all an oppression; indeed he thought very little about him, for he had naturally ceased to count. Besides, Elizabeth filled his mind; and he was spending every possible hour with her in the dell.

On the day before that appointed for the funeral he came back to lunch to find Sir Richard Starton waiting for him. He said that he had driven over to lunch with him and cheer him up. Since he had now no fear whatever that he would discover that he was not the duke James Whitaker was pleased to have his society.

As happened before, the burden of the talk fell upon Sir Richard; and he talked of their common acquaintances in a lively and agreeable manner. His one allusion to the dead man up-stairs showed frankly that he was aware that he was not lunching with a deeply sorrowful brother. His talk grated somewhat on James Whitaker: it still further robbed the subjects of it of their likeness to the distinguished county people in the novels of the cultured lady authoress Millicent had taught him to revere. They were an idle, pleasure-seeking gang; and he felt that their doings as translated through the temperament of Sir Richard ought not to amuse him as they did.

After lunch, as they were drinking their coffee, Sir Richard questioned him about his progress to recovery from the lightning-stroke. He seemed to be really interested in it.

"My arm's still about as stiff as it was; and so are the muscles of my throat," growled James Whitaker quite truthfully.

He had been prudently talking all the while in a raucous voice.

"I was thinking about your memory, rather," said Sir Richard.

"Oh, it varies; but I think it's improving," growled James Whitaker in a tone of satisfaction. "I recognized Edward."

"Ah, but you were expecting him. Do you think you'd have recognized him if you'd just seen him casually?"

"Yes, I knew his face."

"Well, that's satisfactory," said Sir Richard.

He was silent for a while; and once or twice he glanced at James Whitaker with thoughtful questioning eyes.

Then he said in a testing tone: "Lady Cubbington's rather sick about it."

"About what?"

"About your loss of memory."

"Well, I can't help it, can I?" growled James Whitaker.

"No, of course you can't; of course you can't," said Sir Richard quickly; then he added more slowly:

"Only she feels you're not giving your memory a fair chance to recover—as far as she's concerned, you know. You used to drive over to the Grange nearly every day."

"Did I now?" said James Whitaker in a tone of extreme and plainly genuine surprise.

"You did," said Sir Richard.

James Whitaker was again silent. He appeared to be reflecting on this forgotten habit. Sir Richard appeared to be awaiting his declaration that he would forthwith resume it; but James Whitaker had no intention in the world of adopting this habit of his predecessor.

Sir Richard awaited his declaration of resumption for rather more than two minutes. Then he said somewhat sadly:

"These lightning-strokes are queer things. What about Cara L'Esterre?"

"What about who?" cried James Whitaker, using his natural voice in his surprise.

"You don't mean to say that you've forgotten that queen of musical comedy!" cried Sir Richard.

"But I have," growled James Whitaker.

"These lightning-strokes *are* queer things. I could have understood your forgetting so much better, if she'd spent money on you," said Sir Richard philosophically. "But there: *she'll* remind you all right."

James Whitaker frowned at him, but said nothing. It seemed to him that this acquaintance of his predecessor must be regarded in the same light as his racing-

stable. He could only hope that he would have as little trouble in parting from her as he had had in parting with it.

"Of course, Cara is a quite uncommon dear," said Sir Richard.

"Is she?" growled James Whitaker.

"Do you really mean to say that you don't remember her at all?" said Sir Richard earnestly.

"I didn't know that there was such a person in the world till you told me," said James Whitaker not only truthfully but in the most convincing accents of the truth. "I don't think I could have been really intimate with her."

Sir Richard looked doubtful; but he only said: "Well, you're bound to hear from her."

"Am I?" said James Whitaker glumly.

But his face brightened almost in the instant: after all, it was personal interviews, not letters, which were so discomfiting.

Presently Sir Richard asked him if he would like a game of picquet. But James Whitaker said that he was still unable to remember it, that baccarat, which he had learned since the lightning-stroke, was the only game he knew.

"Well, I tell you what it is: you come over to the Grange—let's see: the funeral's to-morrow—on Monday: and we'll start to teach you auction all over again."

"I'll see what I feel like—if my mind seems a bit brighter," said James Whitaker with no great heartiness.

If he had proposed to continue Duke of Lanchester it might have been wise to learn bridge, though he doubted the need to do so; but as it was, there was plainly nothing to be gained by it. By going to the Grange he would expose himself to the danger of having to embrace, or be embraced by, Lady Cubbington; and he had a strong feeling that, with his mind so full of Elizabeth, he would find it somewhat tiresome.

At a quarter to three Sir Richard pleased him by taking his leave. He departed with a faint look of dissatisfaction on his face; and James Whitaker did not know whether he was dissatisfied because he had failed to excite his warmer interest in auction bridge or in Lady Cubbington. But he fancied that the latter failure was the reason of his chagrin.

He went to his tryst with Elizabeth, very well content.

For the most part they now met in the dell. It was indeed, thanks to the dread the late duke had inspired into the country-folk, but little more secluded than the banks of the trout-stream; but it had the air of being more secluded, and it filled them with the pleasant sense of being alone together out of the world. In it the delightful hours fled on swift feet.

James Whitaker was naturally somewhat uneasy, though not very fearful about the funeral. He was not inexperienced in funerals: he had been chief mourner at that of his father: and he had supported Millicent at that of William Ward. He found that the gloomy frown, which came so easily to his face, met every requirement of decorum. He had only to growl at the

old gentlemen who came to him, one by one, and pressed his hand and murmured a few, carefully thought-out words of sympathy.

He observed that the guests at the funeral were not the same people, or indeed of the same type, as those he had entertained at baccarat. On the whole they were older; and all of them were more sober and sedate. He had not thought highly of the intelligence of his card-playing acquaintances. He had perhaps underrated their intelligence in his disappointment at finding them so very different from the country people who really adorned the pages of the cultured authoress of whom Millicent was so earnest an admirer. But he could not but perceive that these more sedate worthies looked not only duller but far more stupid.

He soon found that there had been no need to feel uneasy about confronting so many of the late duke's acquaintances. Not one of them perceived, or could have perceived, anything amiss. After they had taken their leave, he walked down to his tryst with Elizabeth more assured of his position than ever. He felt indeed that having weathered the recognition by Lord Edward Beddard, and compassed his end of rebuilding the villages, he ought to disappear as soon as he had signed the contracts for the improvement of Chigleigh, Wodden and Gant. But his mind was too full of Elizabeth for him to give the matter his serious consideration.

It was on the morrow that the matter of Mr. Brinkman was recalled to his mind. Elizabeth had come to the dell as soon as she had dismissed her Sun-

day-school class; and they were sitting under the oak, talking little, and that in low voices, when they heard a rustling in the bushes on the farther side of the dell. Elizabeth slipped into the covert of a clump of hazels in which they had arranged that she should hide, if a keeper came that way; and James Whitaker went quietly up to the edge of the dell and peered round a tree-trunk. At first he could see nothing; but he observed that the rustling moved up and down, up and down, with a considerable regularity, thirty yards this way and thirty yards that. Then, he caught sight of the figure of a man; and then, as he drew nearer on his slow and uncommonly zigzag advance, he saw that it was Mr. Brinkman.

He watched him for three or four minutes in some wonder. It seemed such an odd way of coming through a wood: Mr. Brinkman would not reach the tree from behind which he watched for several minutes yet. Then he saw that he was stooping a little as he walked up and down, and that his eyes were fixed on the ground. Plainly the steward was searching for something.

James Whitaker came very quietly down into the dell, drew Elizabeth from her hiding-place and told her that they must decamp. Half-way down the narrow path the object of the steward's search flashed on him. . . . It could only be one thing! . . . The body of the duke!

He stopped short in his surprise and (Hammersmith fashion) slapped his thigh, and muttered: "By jove!"

"What is it?" said Elizabeth.

"Oh, nothing—nothing. The man who disturbed us was Brinkman; and he was hunting," he said, and chuckled grimly.

"Then he must have been hunting us!" cried Elizabeth, leaping to a not unnatural conclusion. "But what horrible cheek!"

"Oh, I'll deal with him all right," said James Whitaker with careless assurance.

He was amused for a while by the steward's hopeless quest; then he grew annoyed with him.

"Hang it all! I'm not paying the swine a good salary to spend his time trying to convict me of fraud!" he said to himself indignantly.

None the less he was pleased to have learned what Brinkman was doing: he would not be taken by surprise.

He was careful to go to the office next morning to observe the steward's temper and attitude. He found him looking depressed and nervous; and his eyes were a little wild. He talked to him about the contracts for the rebuilding of Chigleigh, Wodden and Gant, since they were the most annoying subject he could think of, and presently, because Mr. Brinkman could not tell him when they would be ready, he fell into a sudden passion and bellowed at him in a very furious, nerve-racking fashion. He was not abusive; he merely bellowed questions.

After he had gone Mr. Brinkman fairly sniveled with nervous exasperation.

On the following evening he came to the end of

his vain search for a grave in the home wood in the keenest disappointment. But he soon regained hope: he was assured that the duke had been made away with; his body was to be found; and sooner or later he would find it. The sight of his walking El Dorado was a frequent stimulation. In spite of the fact that he was an impostor living gorgeously in stolen luxury and always truculent with him, he by no means hated James Whitaker. Though James Whitaker racked his nerves by his bellowing, he did not lacerate his vanity by abuse. Indeed Mr. Brinkman may be said almost to have been regarding him with a sneaking liking as the ultimate source of great riches. He had certainly a stronger liking for this ferocious and illegitimate knave of a stockbroker than he had had for the late duke, whom he had considered merely an unpleasant fool.

His search in the home wood having proved vain, while promising himself further searches in the woods nearest it and along the banks of the stream, he set himself to find other paths to the damning purse-opening facts. On the next evening he contrived to be overtaken by Tomkins, who was on his way to the village, greeted him in a friendly fashion, paid the usual tribute to the climate of the British Isles, offered him a cigar, and when he had lighted it, said with a careless air and in a careless tone:

"Do you think his Grace has changed much since he was struck by lightning?"

"I can't say as I've took pertickler notice of 'im, Mr. Brinkman," said Tomkins affably.

"Well, I think that he's altered. And I should have thought that being always in such close contact with him, any change in him would have been forced on your notice," said Mr. Brinkman smoothly.

"Well, now you come to speak of it, 'e 'as changed. He's grown more 'umanlike. He don't get into the rages 'e did about nothing at all. Not once since 'e was struck 'as 'e up and thrown a boot at me. Why, I don't believe 'e's as much as cursed me. Oh, yes: now you come to speak of it, that lightning-stroke 'as changed 'im."

"You would almost say he was a different man, in fact," said Mr. Brinkman eagerly.

"No; I wouldn't go so far as to say that," said Tomkins with a judicial air. "But I will say as it's done 'im a world o' good."

"It would be rather interesting to you, as a student of human nature"—Tomkins drew himself upright with a complacent air—"to observe exactly how far the change goes," said Mr. Brinkman.

He foresaw that whatever Tomkins noticed could be used as evidence, should he be compelled, instead of living on this ferocious stockbroker, to sell his information to the Earl of Fleetham.

"It might, Mr. Brinkman—it might," said Tomkins with an important air.

Mr. Brinkman hugged himself to perceive that the valet was the very stuff of which useful witnesses are made: he could easily be persuaded that he had observed anything.

Then he said: "By the way, I should like to see that

coat which was struck by lightning. I should like to see the exact effect of the electricity."

"Certainly, Mr. Brinkman, I'll bring it round to your office in the morning," said Tomkins eagerly, foreseeing a tip.

"Thank you. It's sure to be interesting."

"Oh, yes; coats struck by lightning aren't exactly common," said Tomkins.

When they came through the little wood out on to the road, Mr. Brinkman bade the valet good night and walked up it to his house, which stood above the village. He walked with an air of importance, very like that of Tomkins, for he could not but feel that this endeavor to procure evidence on which to blackmail this impostor was by far the most important transaction in his life. He was also very pleased that he would on the morrow have the coat in his possession. He did not believe that any one had been struck by lightning, and he expected that it would be clear that the coat had been deliberately set on fire. He hoped also to find that it was stained with blood.

As a rule he was of a taciturn habit in his home, for he was uncommonly conscious of his manly superiority; but to-night he was very affable with his wife, condescending often to the level of the womanly intelligence. He thought that this new line of research was promising, and the thought cheered him.

Mrs. Brinkman was the daughter of a farmer, and that night she expressed considerable resentment at the scheme for improving the condition of the laborers on the estate. He found her sympathetic.

He took with him to his office next morning a fairly strong reading-glass, for though he had no intention of returning the coat to Tomkins, he was impatient to justify his suspicion that it was stained with blood.

When Tomkins brought the coat Mr. Brinkman pretended to be very busy, and only tore himself from his writing to give the valet half a dollar and bid him set the coat on a chair. But no sooner had the valet shut the door behind him than he pounced on the coat and bore it to the window.

The burned patch proved a disappointment, for it bore no signs of having been set on fire. Plainly it had been scorched, and the part of it which had crumbled away had left a neat, clean-cut, straight edge. He was forced to the conclusion that the coat *had* been struck by lightning.

This discovery altered the complexion of the affair for him. He sat considering this, to him, new fact for a long while; it did not affect the main feature of the case: the duke's body must none the less be buried somewhere. He pondered all he had heard about the impostor's arrival, struck by lightning. It did not now seem improbable that he had been slightly struck; he might have been with the duke when he was struck. It certainly was the oddest of coincidences that three men should have been struck by lightning in the woods on the same day—the duke, the impostor and the tramp.

Then the truth flashed on him: there had never been any tramp! Or, rather, the stockbroker had been the tramp. Plainly he had lost his position and come to

grief. The duke had met him in the wood, doubtless in answer to some violent appeal and probably with the intention of helping him once more. The lightning had struck both of them, scorched and twisted the face of the duke out of all recognition (the steward had served on the coroner's jury and seen the dreadful face), the impostor had seized his chance and changed clothes with the dead man.

It was as plain as a pikestaff!

CHAPTER XV

MR. BRINKMAN was still in the first fine flush of his joy when James Whitaker paid his morning visit to the office. Fortunately he heard his approaching footsteps in time to cram the coat into a drawer, out of sight.

James Whitaker entered scowling, as usual; but Mr. Brinkman was careless of his scowl, for he felt, joyfully, that he held him in the hollow of his hand. As James Whitaker gave him instructions about certain details of the management of the estate, and in particular to observe and report the progress the workmen were making in the draining of Little Lanchester (they were leaving the rebuilding till the sanitation should be sound), and to decide whether they were working as hard and as quickly as could be expected, or whether they needed a little urging, the steward gloated over him. He even asked him a foolish question, in order to provoke him to bellow at him and enjoy the feeling that now he did not care a tinker's curse for his bellowing. Indeed, the more violent James Whitaker grew, the more keenly Mr. Brinkman enjoyed the sense of his power to bring him, confounded and lamb-like, to his feet. He even dared to address him as "Your Grace," in a tone of the most marked sarcasm.

James Whitaker was quick to observe the change in him, and wondered what new discovery he had made, or believed himself to have made, to give him this ease and confidence. He was not at all distressed that he should have made one. He was sure that it could not be of real importance; he could not possibly in the time have discovered the Hammersmith shop. He had dismissed him carelessly from his mind before he had gone half-way across the park on his way to his tryst with Elizabeth in the dell.

He had not left the office very long before Mr. Brinkman's triumphant joy began to fade. As he considered the situation at greater length his discovery began to grow less cheering. He did not for a moment doubt its correctness; but he began to doubt, painfully, its value. He began to see that it was going to be very difficult indeed to make it a commercial asset. The full difficulty of proving that this impostor had changed places with the duke in those extraordinary circumstances was growing clear. It was indeed an amazing tale. If he went with it to the Earl of Fleetham, he might indeed persuade that nobleman, since he enjoyed the reputation of being nearly an imbecile, of its truth; but his lawyers would not think it worth examination.

Besides, there was no evidence of the change. It was useless to exhume the duke: the lightning had done its work too thoroughly. On the other hand, the coroner and every man on the coroner's jury, except himself, would swear confidently that the man on whom they had held an inquest was not the duke. He might

indeed find dozens of witnesses to swear that the impostor was, or had been, a member of the Stock Exchange; but the impostor could produce as many and far more credible witnesses to swear that he was the Duke of Lanchester. They would swear it with the more vigor since, if he were not the duke, he had made utter fools of them all.

Mr. Brinkman's high spirits sank and sank. The longer he considered the situation the more difficult it grew. He pondered and pondered it, but he could not see how to turn it to his profit. He felt strongly that not only had fortune entrenched the impostor almost impregnably, but that he was of a dour and stubborn character to make the fullest use of those entrenchments.

He pondered his employer's character at length, and slowly his spirits rose again. It might be difficult beyond measure to prove in a law-court that he was not the duke; but after all, he had no intention of going with his tale to the Earl of Fleetham, unless the impostor refused to pay. But he would not refuse. No matter how savage the nature of a probably disreputable and almost certainly illegitimate stockbroker who had usurped a dukedom, he must pay to have the secret of his usurpation kept. However furious the impostor might be, Mr. Brinkman was sure that he was far too intelligent not to grasp that fact. He might rage; indeed, he would rage; but he would pay. His spirits rose again to their triumphant height as his last misgiving vanished; he would go to his blackmailing with his heart free from care.

But he made no haste about it; he wished to enjoy to the full his anticipations of triumph before he enjoyed the triumph itself.

The next afternoon Mr. Lamplow and Judson brought the contracts for the draining and rebuilding of Chigleigh, Wodden and Gant, and James Whitaker signed them. Mr. Brinkman perceived that he might easily prevent this by apprising the usurper (he now, in his mind, substituted this milder term for the earlier "impostor") of his knowledge of his secret and bidding him go no further with the scheme than the draining and rebuilding of Little Lanchester. But he had come to the conclusion that the Duke of Lanchester was now committed to the scheme, and to refuse to sign the final contracts would set tongues needlessly wagging. It seemed to him that the less the Duke of Lanchester was, at the moment, in the public eye the better.

But this signing of the contracts was for James Whitaker the signal for departure. His work at Lanchester Abbey was done.

He was bitterly resentful at it. He had now been at the Abbey eighteen days, and this extension of his stay had made a great difference in his feelings. He had settled down very comfortably in the position of duke; indeed, he could not be blind to the fact that his was a nature admirably attuned to the position. Already it had become wholly natural to him to be waited on by skilful servants, to enjoy the cooking of an accomplished chef, and the flavors of the finest wines and cigars; and it would be difficult and not a

little painful to break himself of these excellent habits. For him they were excellent—he was sure of it—and after all, it must be a scientific impossibility that a man should be the very spit of a duke and not also possess a ducal nature. If he had not given it play, if, as he had intended, Providence had allowed him to depart at the end of the first week, it would have been a very different matter: these habits could not have obtained this hold on his perhaps too susceptible disposition; indeed, they would not have had the time to become habits at all. Naturally he was resentful, and he felt that he had every right to be resentful; these habits were no fault of his.

But after all, these were the merest trifles compared with Elizabeth. He had now known her seventeen days, and had spent in her society some hours of fifteen of them; and with all the force of his simple and direct nature he had all the while been growing more and more absorbed in her. Never in all his life had he enjoyed a feeling about any one, or anything, one-twentieth as strong as his feeling for her. She was not merely the chief thing in his life; she had been that within three days of their first meeting. He could not now see life at all apart from her. Without her he could not accept it. How was he to disappear and yet keep her? The difficulty of doing so seemed insuperable.

He did not allow himself to be immediately harassed by this. It was true that the signing of the contracts was the signal to depart. But there was no one to make him act on it. He was rather of the opinion

that the value of his work gave him the right to stay a little longer. At any rate, he was not going until he had found the way of taking Elizabeth with him, and he gave no little time and thought to its discovery.

But though he was not actually harassed by the problem he was somewhat irritated by his slowness in finding its solution; and in the middle of his dinner the next evening he was yet more irritated by a heavy shower, which presently became a steady downpour. It made it plainly impossible for Elizabeth to meet him in the dell that night. Mr. Brinkman therefore did not choose the most propitious evening for apprising him of his exact knowledge of the way in which he had attained to his dukedom.

Mr. Brinkman was, as a rule, an abstemious man, but he braced himself for this important interview with half a bottle of port, a wine he drank with his dessert on Sunday afternoons because he believed it to be still the wine of the English country gentleman. Thanks to its heartening warmth, he came through the rain to the Abbey and asked to see the duke in a fine confidence.

Jenkinson was surprised by this unusual and late visit, and left him in the great hall while he went to see if the duke would receive him.

James Whitaker's ill-temper had been growing and growing as he sat in his smoking-room listening to the sound of the rain which was keeping Elizabeth away from him, till he might very well be described as being in the condition of spoiling for a fight. At the news that Mr. Brinkman had come to see him on

important business, some of the gloom lifted from his spirit and his face; he felt in the very mood to deal faithfully with a blackmailer, and with considerable heartiness he bade Jenkinson bring him to him.

Mr. Brinkman entered the room with a brave air, and was quite undaunted by his new employer's grim face: as was but natural, seeing that he had the whip-hand of him.

"Good evening, Mr. Brinkman. Sit down. What have you come about?" growled James Whitaker.

"Good evening," said Mr. Brinkman coldly.

He chose the most comfortable easy chair with ostentatious slowness, sat down in it and gazed at James Whitaker with shining, triumphant eyes. James Whitaker disliked them exceedingly.

"I have come to see *your Grace* on a matter of great importance," said Mr. Brinkman in a pompous tone, laying a deep sarcastic stress on "your Grace"; and he paused.

"All right: fire away," said James Whitaker carelessly.

"I think—I think *your Grace* could guess what I have come about," said the steward in a tone of deep meaning and with a yet deeper sarcastic stress on the title.

"Could I?" said James Whitaker, with the same indifference.

He was thinking how very much he disliked the steward's greedy little eyes and mean foxy face.

"You could, *your Grace*. I'm sure you could," said

the steward yet more slowly and in a tone of yet deeper meaning.

He had read of men, chiefly detectives, playing with other men as a cat plays with a mouse, and he felt that he was so playing with this truculent scoundrel. It pleased him greatly.

James Whitaker gazed at him with indifferent eyes; then, with sudden violence, he snapped:

"But I'm not going to try! Get on!"

Mr. Brinkman had come prepared for violence, but its suddenness jarred his nerves badly.

"It's no use your t-t-taking that t-t-tone. You're not in a p-p-position to do it," he stammered.

"Position? What position? What do you mean?" roared James Whitaker, pleased to have set the steward stammering.

"You know quite well what I mean! I know your secret!" snapped Mr. Brinkman, with the air and something of the squeak of a cornered rat.

"Secret? What secret?" roared James Whitaker.

"The secret of your impersonation—how you came to be the Duke of Lanchester!"

"The secret of—are you mad, or are you drunk?" bellowed James Whitaker.

Mr. Brinkman made a great effort, got control of his voice and squeaked quickly and shrilly, but clearly: "It's no good your kicking; the game's up. I know the whole affair—every step of it—your illegitimacy—the way you threw away your chances in life—especially the mess you made of stockbroking and the way you grew more and more disreputable—your coming

down here to see the duke—his being struck by lightning—your changing places with him and concealing the change by pretending it was the result of being struck by lightning yourself. I know the whole business, I tell you—every step of it."

He paused, and James Whitaker glared at him with unaffected amazement: what was this about his illegitimacy and his failure as a stockbroker?

"You may well look flabbergasted!" cried Mr. Brinkman in a less squeaky voice, with a touch of triumph in his tone. "You thought that your luck had covered all your tracks. You didn't allow for Erasmus Brinkman."

He rapped his chest proudly.

"Well, I'm damned!" said James Whitaker softly, but in a tone of unspeakable ferocity.

He saw the mistakes into which the steward had fallen by misunderstanding the word broker, and he saw that they made him harmless.

"I'm glad you see where you are," said Mr. Brinkman on a fuller note of triumph. "You thought you were having everything your own way, and had scooped up the whole lot. But you were wrong—quite wrong. It's Brinkman, Lanchester and Company; and Brinkman is head of the firm, drawing two-thirds—two-thirds."

James Whitaker's natural antipathy to the steward rose to its full height, and he made no effort to check it. His instinct showed him the right way to treat him; and his reason approved his instinct.

Without a word he sprang across the space between

them and caught Mr. Brinkman a thundering box on the ear. With a shrill yelp of pain Mr. Brinkman rose to receive a thundering box on the other ear and yelp again. Then James Whitaker set about him; he smacked him, he pommeled him and he kicked him. He did not hit him a tenth part as hard as he could have hit, nor did he mark his face; but his smacks and blows and kicks were exceedingly painful. Mr. Brinkman blubbered as he howled, and he howled louder and louder. Then he threw himself on the floor, with his arms over his head, and howled and blubbered there.

James Whitaker kicked him hard in the ribs three times, then he went to the table and mixed himself a brandy and soda with the air of a man who has performed a useful task in a thoroughly satisfactory fashion. He lighted a cigar, returned to his easy chair and gazed at the blubbering blackmailer with an air of pleasant content.

The vehemence of Mr. Brinkman's emotion grew less intense; his blubbering sank to a dismal snivel; and James Whitaker growled:

"You infernal little blackmailing scoundrel. I've a good mind to give you the sack."

Mr. Brinkman only sniveled.

"If I didn't think you were drunk, I *would* give you the sack, though I don't want the trouble of a new man who doesn't know about things," growled James Whitaker.

He was silent again till Mr. Brinkman stirred; then he bellowed: "Get up!"

Mr. Brinkman sat up slowly and stiffly, sniveling still. With his red, tearful, dazed eyes and his red, tear-stained, working face, he was indeed a dismal sight. He should have gazed at James Whitaker with the eyes of hate; he merely gazed at him with the eyes of misery.

James Whitaker scowled at him for a good minute, then he growled: "Stop that sniveling and get out. You'd better not let Jenkinson see you, or it will be all over the place that I gave you the licking you asked for, you dirty little hound."

Mr. Brinkman gazed at him with a dazed air; then he seemed to grasp his meaning and rose slowly to his feet. He wiped his eyes and face with his handkerchief, then he went stiffly, on unsteady feet, out of the room. He found the great hall empty and hurried stiffly across it, down the corridor into his office. He turned the key in the door, sat down, and rubbing aching spots, collected his wits. Then he wept afresh that he should have been so hardly treated.

James Whitaker smoked on quietly in a great satisfaction with the drastic fashion in which he had treated his steward. He was sure that the pommeling had not made him any more dangerous than he had been; he thought it quite likely that it had made him less dangerous. He would have liked to discharge him and be done with him. But it seemed more prudent to keep him under his eye at the Abbey. He would perceive, he thought, any symptoms of his growing again dangerous.

When Mr. Brinkman dried his fresh tears his mind

was again in working order, and he found that his conviction that James Whitaker was a ferocious and illegitimate stockbroker was shaken to its foundations. It would be too much to say that he believed him to be the duke, for doubts still lingered in his mind. But the longer he considered James Whitaker's spontaneity of word and action the stronger grew his feeling that he had been misled by what he had heard of Lord Edward Beddard's quarrel with him, that he was indeed the Duke of Lanchester. Besides, there was one fact in the affair which weighed with him above everything else, and that was that James Whitaker preferred to put up with a blackmailer as a steward than be a little bothered by a stranger. That was the Duke of Lanchester he had always known.

When at last he was quite composed he came cautiously out of his office, along the corridor, into the great hall. To his relief it was still empty. He put on his cap and mackintosh, slipped out of the door and walked stiffly home, a sore dispirited man.

As the exhilaration at having dealt faithfully with his steward wore off James Whitaker's gloom at being robbed by the rain of his evening with Elizabeth grew heavier than ever; and he went to bed very sad.

But the next morning was fine and sunny; and he breakfasted in good spirits. After breakfast he thought it well to go to Mr. Brinkman's office. This morning the steward once more rose as sharply as his stiffness allowed, washed his hands at him and said in a meek voice:

"Good morning, your Grace."

He knew that he ought to be full of resentment against the man who had put such a humiliation on him. But he was not. If he had been sure that James Whitaker was an impostor he would have hated him freely enough; but he might be the duke. If he were the duke he could hardly resent having been thrashed for trying to blackmail him; and in any case it would have been impossible to hate a man of his high rank. His feeling toward James Whitaker was, at any rate for the time being, a wholesome dread.

"Good morning. Sober?" growled James Whitaker.

Mr. Brinkman did not reply to the question; he looked sheepish and shuffled his feet. James Whitaker asked a few questions about the morning's letters and left him. Mr. Brinkman had had thoughts of resigning his post: not very serious thoughts, for it was a good post. James Whitaker's careless attitude to him seemed to him to render resignation unnecessary, and he was relieved.

Thanks to their disappointment the night before Elizabeth and James Whitaker met that morning with a greater delight than ever. But the dell, damp from the heavy rain, was no longer the place for lovers it had been; and he had little difficulty in persuading her to come to the Abbey in the afternoon. Once more they approached it through the shrubberies and entered it by one of the windows of the blue drawing-room; and when, an hour and a half later, Jenkinson found them sitting on the terrace in front of the blue

drawing-room, he supposed that Elizabeth had just come.

They had spent a very pleasant hour in the library. Elizabeth had asked him to take her to see the rooms in which he lived himself; but he had refused to take the risk. It meant traversing all the Abbey. She protested that now that they were quite definitely going to be married she would not be compromised by coming to the Abbey; but he had it in his mind that he would yet disappear, and she must not be talked about. She had grown the dearer to him for that he felt that he was no longer merely a means to her of obtaining a freer fuller life; it seemed to him that he had grown for her, as she had grown for him, the chief part of life.

It was an enchanting thought, but naturally it made it more difficult to disappear; it made it impossible to leave her behind him. He felt that that might easily be nearly as cruel to her as it would be to himself. He was loath enough to hurt himself so cruelly, but he was infinitely more loath to hurt her.

There is no saying whence the story of the thrashing of Mr. Brinkman spread abroad. It may be that Jenkinson had heard sounds of pommeling; it may have been that the great hall had not been so empty as the dazed and disheveled steward had supposed when he hurried across it to his office; or it may be that he had failed to hide his bruises from his wife and she had told one of her sisters, the wives of farmers at Wodden. But in the course of the day

the story had spread all round the countryside, and Elizabeth heard it from her father at dinner.

She was surprised by it: not by the fact that James Whitaker had beaten his steward, but by the fact that he had told her nothing about it. She had believed herself more in his confidence.

They met that evening at their old trysting-place, the bridge over the stream, and took the way to a thatched summer-house in one of the lower shrubberies, since the dell would be damper than ever at night.

When they had sat down, she came straight to the matter of interest, saying: "Why did you thrash Mr. Brinkman?"

James Whitaker was taken aback. He had not thought for a moment that Brinkman would be so foolish, or so careless, as to let any one know of his punishment.

"How do you know I have been thrashing Brinkman?" he said.

"Everybody knows it! Why did you do it?" she said with the firmness of one who has a right to an answer.

"Oh, they don't know why I did it?" he said quickly.

"No."

"Well, I hammered him for trying to blackmail me," he said slowly.

"How did he try to blackmail you?" she said quickly.

"He came to me with a story that I wasn't the duke but a disreputable stockbroker who had taken his place."

"B-b-but that was what I t-t-told you," she stammered; and he could see her eyes shining brightly with excitement.

"His story had more details in it: you never said I was a stockbroker, disreputable or otherwise," said James Whitaker calmly. "And he went on to propose to share my income."

"Just as I proposed to share the d-d-dukedom," said Elizabeth faintly.

"But he proposed to take two-thirds of the income. You were ready to go halves," said James Whitaker.

"I always did detest that little man. He has such a mean face," said Elizabeth.

"Yes, he's a very different thing. Anybody would be charmed to share anything with you. But with Brinkman, no. As you say, he hasn't a nice face," said James Whitaker; and he drew her yet closer to him and kissed her.

She quivered in his arms and laughed a low contented laugh.

"I'm glad that you didn't beat *me,*" she said.

"No, this is better," he said.

They were silent for a minute or two; then he perceived that here was an excellent opening for sounding her.

"Suppose I turned out not to be the duke after all?" he said in a sufficiently careless tone.

"I often wonder whether you are," she said quietly.

"You wonder *what?*" he cried.

"Whether you're the duke. At first I thought you were. But lately—ever since—since you first kissed

me I've felt sometimes that you're not. But generally I know you must be; it would be so extraordinary if you weren't. But all the same, I feel you're not," she said, speaking quietly and thoughtfully.

He was indeed surprised and amazed.

"But if I'm not the Duke of Lanchester, who on earth could I be?" he cried.

"You'd be the man they buried, or thought they buried, of course—the tramp," she said quickly.

"Well, I'll be shot!" cried James Whitaker.

She was truly full of surprises to-night. He had suddenly learned not only that she had been cherishing these suspicions all the while, but that she had worked out the process by which he had gained his dukedom. He stared at her blankly; and he was glad that, in that dim light, she could not see his face.

"But after all it doesn't matter," she said calmly.

"It doesn't?" he cried.

"No. You've got the dukedom; and nobody can turn you out," she said firmly.

"Oh, come: do you mean to say you would encourage me to stick to it if I weren't the duke?" he said in an aggrieved tone.

He felt an odd sense of injury at hearing any doubts thrown on his right to the dukedom.

"Well, I've thought it all out; and it seems to me that though it would be very wrong for any one else to have seized the dukedom, you're different," she said in a confident voice. "Already you've started to do more for the people on the estate than the last five dukes have done. And then if you weren't the duke,

the Earl of Fleetham would be; and he never expected to be the duke; so he won't be disappointed; and anyhow, he has all the money he wants as it is. Besides, they say that he's a dreadful person—half-cracked."

"I see," said James Whitaker in a non-committal tone.

"And besides all that, I have a feeling that you were meant to be duke," she said in a solemn tone. "Dukes don't get struck by lightning for nothing. And then Lord Edward Beddard was struck in a different way. You were *meant* to take their place."

James Whitaker had himself had a feeling that Providence had a hand in clearing these obstacles from his path; but on hearing its intentions firmly put into words he shook his head.

"Oh, yes: you were," said Elizabeth firmly.

"I really believe you would rather I weren't really the duke," he said.

He felt her quiver; then she said slowly: "Well, if you weren't really the duke, you—you wouldn't have been mixed up with those horrible women."

CHAPTER XVI

JAMES WHITAKER came away from that meeting still resentful, unreasonable as he knew such resentment to be, at her doubt that he was the Duke of Lanchester. But that resentment did not blind him to the advantage of her doubt: it would soften for her the shock of learning, when the time came to tell her, that he was not the duke. It would probably make it easier to persuade her to disappear with him when the time came to disappear.

He could indeed see no likelihood of his disappearing in the immediate future. Mr. Brinkman was justifying his treatment of him by fawning on him like a beaten dog; but it was quite clear that, did he disappear, he would be yelping savagely on his trail. His desire for a short holiday had indeed led him into a trap.

He chafed bitterly at this constraint. The fact that he was for the while a duke by compulsion robbed the dukedom of something of its charm, while the prospect of beginning life afresh, in some younger country, with Elizabeth and the money he had won at baccarat, grew more and more alluring.

There was no doubt that this easy and luxurious life was developing his nature, for he chafed at this

restraint which the steward was exercising on him with an almost greater fierceness than he had chafed under the oppression of his old life at Hammersmith. When he dictated his letters to him, he gazed almost lovingly at his skinny throat, and tingled with the pleasant thought of choking the life out of the little brute. But he had no intention of risking his own neck for the pleasure of wringing Mr. Brinkman's.

It began to appear probable that he was settled in the dukedom for some time; and much as he longed to start life afresh with Elizabeth in a new country, he made up his mind that he must make the best of it. In his heart of hearts he knew that he would be very well content with the dukedom, if it were not being forced upon him by Mr. Brinkman.

He had, moreover, a feeling, a foolish feeling which he did not encourage, that Providence, or Fate, or whatever was the directing impulse behind the affairs of mortals, was conspiring with Mr. Brinkman to force the dukedom on him. Now that the duke and Lord Edward Beddard were dead, it did not seem to belong to any one in particular. He was far too much a son of his common-sense age to feel that the fact that a great-great-grandfather of the affluent but crack-brained Earl of Fleetham had been Duke of Lanchester, gave him any pressing right to it. Indeed, the thought that a position of such responsibility and power should be filled by an imbecile was bitterly annoying. There was so much to be said for its being held by a man who would try to put it to a better use than keeping a racing-stable. He would certainly re-

main in it without any very painful moral qualms as long as the danger of abandoning it kept him duke.

In spite of the constraint under which he was living, he enjoyed the next two days exceedingly.

Then on the morning of the third day came three letters. Lady Cubbington wrote that she was coming to lunch on the morrow to try to cheer him up after the recent depressing event; Lady Middlemore wrote to beg him to come to London and dine with her on the morrow and she would try to cheer him up after the recent depressing event; and Miss Cara L'Esterre wrote more briefly and slangily, bidding him come and be cheered up at the Savoy on the following night. One such letter was enough to dash the spirits of a thoroughly domesticated man; three should have been crushing. But owing to the pressure of the ducal life James Whitaker was less domesticated than he had been; and cheered by the conviction that nothing feebler than a traction engine could get him within three hundred yards of any of the three ladies he ate his breakfast with a very good appetite.

None the less, though by no means panic-stricken, he was troubled by this simultaneous onslaught. It grew clearer and clearer that, if he did not disappear, there was only one way out of these entanglements in which his predecessor had so thoughtlessly landed him, and that was marriage with a fourth person.

Then out of this discomfort arose a desire, the desire to get outside the whole situation and consider it from a distance. He thought that he could not do better than retire to his shop at Hammersmith and con-

sider it from there. He was used to considering things there, for during the last ten years he had done most of his thinking in the house in Watergate Street.

Moreover, it would be killing two birds with one stone. He was resolved to free himself for good from the old cramped life; and he was eager to give Millicent the pleasure of feeling that she was quite free from him, free to lead her own simple cultured life, untroubled by any demands from him for housekeeping or affection. Again, a few days in the house in Watergate Street would make it clear whether he would be able, after the pleasant full life he was leading at the Abbey, to endure at all life on the old terms. He had the strongest suspicion that he would not. He was quite sure that he could not endure it apart from Elizabeth.

He went to his sitting-room, and using a pencil, since it was easier to imitate his predecessor's handwriting in pencil than in ink, he wrote the three needful telegrams. He told Lady Cubbington that he was going to London on the morning of the morrow; and he told Lady Middlemore and Miss Cara L'Esterre that it was impossible to accept their invitations. He sent the telegrams to the village post-office, and presently betook himself to meet Elizabeth. When he told her that he was going to London they were both depressed by the thought of their coming separation, though it was only for three days.

On the following afternoon he motored to London, as he had learned had been the habit of his predecessor, and left the portmanteau, which Tomkins had

packed so full of clothes for him, at the Ritz. He told the clerk that he was uncertain whether he would be back to sleep, and took the tube to Hammersmith.

When he came out of the tube into the Broadway, he was at once afflicted with an uneasiness little short of nausea. He felt plunged once more into the old life, the wearisome, ugly, stifling life of pointless struggle and miserable aims, the life of dirty shirts, poor food badly cooked, and tiresome, cultured, sandy Millicent. He was smitten with some compunction that he should think so unkindly of her. He would never have allowed himself to think so of her before his holiday. But the freedom in which he had been living was engendering in him a new frankness with himself: she *was* sandy, she *was* cultured, and she *did* weary him; he would not be ashamed of himself. He did, however, excuse himself somewhat by assuring himself that she regarded him with an even greater aversion than he regarded her.

He walked slowly down to Watergate Street, detesting Hammersmith more and more. He met two acquaintances, formerly Tigers, coming out of a saloon bar, and greeted them glumly. He was pleased to perceive that they plainly did not observe anything unusual in his appearance. He had been careful to dress in a dark tweed suit and a cap of the same stuff; and they naturally lacked the knowledge to perceive how well the clothes were cut.

When he came to Watergate Street he found that it had, to his eyes, shrunk and grown more squalid; and when he came into the shop he found that it smelled

vilely. Glue that had gone bad, the old stuffing of second-hand couches which he had been restuffing, rotting leather, filled it with the stalest smell. He supposed that when, as a boy, he first came to the shop he had observed the smell; but he had lived in it, unaware, for years. The air of Lanchester had purified his nostrils.

He walked through the shop and found Millicent sitting reading in the stuffy little parlor behind it. He thought that she looked sandier than ever. She rose quickly, nervously, at the sight of him; and he saw plainly the effort she made to look pleased at his return. It was not very successful. He felt her shrink as he kissed her cheek. He had long known that any contact, physical contact, with him was unpleasant to her, and he had long thought that such a sexless, anemic creature as she should never have married. He felt that not merely he, but any husband, would have become repugnant to her. Well, it was all the better: he need be under no compunction whatever at leaving her; she would be glad to be rid of him. He observed that the stuffy little parlor reeked most abominably of cockroaches and pickles.

They talked for a while about his stay in the country; and he told her that he had taken service with a firm engaged in buying old furniture all over England and exporting it to New York. She seemed very little interested in the matter till he said that he had arranged to go to New York for two or three years to take a post in the American branch of the firm.

Her pale eyes brightened at the thought of being

rid of him for so long. Then her face fell again; and she said quickly:

"I'm sure I shouldn't like New York. It wouldn't agree with me."

"I'm afraid I shouldn't be able to take you with me. Living is so expensive there; and my salary wouldn't run to two of us," he said.

Her pale eyes shone again with relief; and she said eagerly: "And you'll be gone two years?"

"At least," he said, and heard her sigh of pleasure.

She rang for Amy and told her to go and get some chops for his supper. The old woman, her eyes full of her perpetual dull hostility to him (she was the partisan of Millicent and had, moreover, always resented his promotion from the kitchen to the parlor), grumbled at not having been informed early in the day that he was returning. He observed that she added another unpleasant scent to the stale-smelling room.

He had no desire to taste ever again a chop of Amy's cooking; and he gave her five dollars and bade her buy a roast chicken and a tongue. When she had gone, he discussed Millicent's future. His suggestion was that she should sell the Hammersmith house (the shop and business must of course be sold, since he would not be there to manage them) and buy a cottage in the country at Sarratt, or Flaunden, or Chipperfield, but at any rate somewhere on that plateau because she had stayed at Sarratt and found that it suited her. The money from the sale of the house and shop would pay for the cottage; and he would

allow her five dollars a week out of his salary. On that she could live in luxury with Amy as her servant.

Naturally she was startled at the thought of this uprooting from the life she knew. But the idea of a cottage in the country attracted her. He was resolved to cover up his tracks; and he convinced her that it was impossible for her to continue to live in the Hammersmith house on two hundred and fifty dollars a year. Then he told her that he would be sailing to New York in less than a week, and that he would have to set things in train before his departure. He did not wish her to linger on in Hammersmith, for in spite of his assurance that Mr. Brinkman was well on the way to lick the hand that beat him, accident might give him a clue to the Hammersmith shop; and he wished it swept away with the least possible delay.

He was so pleased with the progress he had made with her that he ate his supper of cold chicken and tongue with relish, and enjoyed the jug of beer from the Prince of Wales public-house. He found his bedroom cramped and dingy, but less of an offense to his nostrils than the rest of the house. The middle shelf of the bookcase which stood against the wall opposite the bed, on which were ranged his well-thumbed favorite friends and comforters, was the first thing in the house on which his eyes rested with pleasure. He decided that he would take away with him the books on that shelf, those and the few poor relics of his unfortunate father.

He slept well, but did not immediately on waking

recognize his surroundings. When he did, it struck him that there was not any real need for him to spend another night in the house. To Millicent he could always make the excuse that business prevented him from coming back; and with regard to the expense, he had brought with him one hundred and fifty dollars of the duke's money from the secret drawer in the bureau, in addition to his own money won at baccarat. He would stay at the Ritz, as his predecessor had been used to do; and naturally the Lanchester money paid the expenses of the Duke of Lanchester.

There was no bathroom in the house; and he missed his bath. The tea, the stale bread, the margarine, the bloaters of old Amy's grubby cooking seemed to him detestable. He rose from breakfast resolved never to eat or sleep in the house again. Before he went out he erased his name from the fly-leaves of the books he proposed to take with him, and packed them in a parcel, which he addressed to the Duke of Lanchester at the Ritz. He posted it at the post-office in the Broadway, and then betook himself to Lloyds' bank. He had always banked at the Home Counties Bank, as William Ward had done. But his account had been of such nature that his sudden production of ten thousand dollars would excite surprise. It took him no long time to arrange with the manager the preparation of the settlement, of which the bank should act as trustee, of six thousand dollars on Millicent, to be invested so as to bring her in at least five dollars a week, and to be paid to her weekly. Considering her

fecklessness, especially in matters of business, he thought that arrangement the best for her.

That done he betook himself to a house-agent and arranged with him to sell the house and such of the furniture as Millicent would not want for her cottage in the country. As the bonds which bound him to it loosened, Hammersmith lost some of its sordid and repellent air; but its smell still offended his nostrils.

He went back to the shop and found Millicent reading in the stuffy parlor. He told her what he had done; and she was surprised and disturbed to find herself confronted by so sudden an uprooting. She had regarded it vaguely as something to happen some time in the future; and left to herself, would have played feebly with the idea for months. This sudden call to action was most disturbing; and old Amy was indignant indeed. James Whitaker said that he must go to London on business, and left them, lamenting and indignant, to talk their discomfort off.

He found that he had a small suite of rooms at the hotel, sitting-room, bedroom and bathroom. He had a bath and changed into clothes to which the odor of Hammersmith did not cling. He lunched in the grill-room with an appreciation of the cooking the stronger for his brief return to the cooking of Amy.

After lunch he thought that it would be wise to go to one of the duke's clubs for a while, and be seen there. Moreover, he was a little curious to see what club life was like. He betook himself to the Para-

gon, therefore, since he had gathered from the talk of Sir Richard Starton that that was the club his predecessor had frequented; and there he found two men who had been at his baccarat party. He was annoyed to find that he had forgotten their names, but presently in the course of their talk, he learned them again. They asked him to come to the card-room to play auction, and gave him the opportunity he desired of talking about his loss of memory since he had been struck by lightning. He did not find their talk of any interest to him; and after half an hour of it he left the club.

He walked down Piccadilly slowly, trying to get the proper pleasure from his new outlook on it from his ducal elevation. But it was slowly borne in upon him that he did not, even in these circumstances, greatly like it; he believed that the sweet air and beautiful country around the Abbey had spoiled London for him. He wished that he had kept the motor-car in town; he would have driven out to Richmond Park.

He had just passed the bottom of Bond Street when an electric coupé ran up to the curb, stopped, and a charming excited voice cried:

"John! John!"

He remembered, just in time, that his name was John, and turned to see Lady Middlemore's face framed in the window of the coupé. She was flushed; and her eyes were shining with delight at the sight of him.

He was taken aback at the sight of her, but not quite unpleasantly. Her flushed face was charming; and she was truly the type naturally attractive to him,

though Elizabeth left little room in his heart for any one else at the moment. When she threw open the door of the coupé and bade him get in, he had not the heart to dash the joy in her shining eyes.

"So you've come to town after all!" she cried.

"Yes, I had to—business," he growled.

"Oh, yes: I know that business," she said jealously.

He gathered from her tone that she was suggesting that some other woman had brought him to London; and he said nothing.

"Where shall we go?" she said.

"Let's go to Richmond Park and get some clean air," he said. "This place is simply poisonous."

"Don't say that that wretched lightning-stroke has set you against London," she said.

"I don't know whether it was the lightning-stroke or not; but London seems to me to have such a vile smell. I want to get back to the Abbey," he growlel.

"You *have* changed," she said. "But perhaps—perhaps there's a woman at the Abbey."

James Whitaker felt himself blushing guiltily; and he growled quickly: "You seem to think of nothing but women."

"And you?" she said.

He did not answer; and she told her chauffeur to drive to Richmond Park.

Then, smiling happily, she nestled closer to him; and he perceived that she expected him to hold her there. He did not like to disappoint her; and since, moreover, her waist was naturally of the type which attracted his arm, he put it round it without any great

reluctance, though he would have very much preferred it to be the waist of Elizabeth.

She seemed satisfied with his indulging her to this point, and talked to him lightly and brightly, after some inquiries in the proper mournful tone concerning the end of Lord Edward Beddard, about his life at the Abbey, and his neighbors, chiefly about those of them with whom he had played baccarat. She amused him; she seemed of the same bright, alert spirit as Elizabeth. She did not spare Lady Cubbington; but the shafts which she let fly at her, if they were winged with malice, were tipped with wit.

When they came into the park her words came more slowly and grew fewer. He reflected on the monstrous unfairness of the distribution of women: as James Whitaker he would have been happy and content with Elizabeth, or Lady Middlemore, or Lady Cubbington, and none of them had come his way; as Duke of Lanchester all three of them were thrust upon him—to say nothing of Miss Cara L'Esterre.

In the more wooded part of the park, descending from the coupé, they strolled for an hour under the trees; and he found it a very pleasant way of whiling away some of his enforced stay in London, away from Elizabeth. Truly no squalid sight or noxious smell offended him here. They went to the Star and Garter and had their tea in a room from which they had the famous view up the winding Thames, and they lingered over it. He was finding it more and more pleasant to be with her. She was a charming

stimulant; he was talking almost as freely with her as he did with Elizabeth.

When they came out of the hotel, they drove round the park once more; and its soothing greenery and clean air weakened a little his unpleasant memories of his return to Hammersmith. It was half past seven before they reached Piccadilly; and he needed no pressing to accept her invitation to dine at her flat and go with her to the Russian ballet at Covent Garden. She left him at the Ritz; he dressed, and went to Mount Street.

Hers was a charming flat, admirably decorated to match her dark beauty; the dinner was excellent; and she was even more stimulating than she had been in the afternoon. The shop at Hammersmith was withdrawing farther into the distance. He felt that he was in his proper element: he was entertained and amused (the appeal was all the while to his intelligence), and he was pleased to find that he could hold his own. He did not shine, indeed (he knew that he would never shine), but he held his own; and greatly it pleased him. All the while she kept Elizabeth vividly in his mind. Elizabeth was not so amusing or entertaining, indeed, but she saw the world with the same keen clear vision. In another five or six years, when she had reached Lady Middlemore's age and seen as much of it, she might have an even firmer grasp of the facts of it; and always she was more beautiful than Lady Middlemore.

He was sorry to leave the pleasant flat for the

Russian ballet. He had never seen the Russian dancers. In the old days, when they were at their keenest in the pursuit of culture, he and Millicent had been wont to come to the gallery to hear and see operas of Wagner; and their enjoyment of them had been much increased by the sense that they were performing a serious duty. He found it more pleasant, though less thrilling, to watch the dancers from a comfortable box. Between the ballets three men came to it; and all of them knew him. Also they had heard that he had lost his memory.

One of them, Lord Orrington, when he found that James Whitaker did not recognize him, said that it must be very pleasant, as well as useful, to lose one's memory.

"Not a bit of it!" growled James Whitaker quickly. "Look at all the pleasant things one has forgotten."

"You haven't forgotten one pleasant thing, at any rate," said Lord Orrington, looking at Lady Middlemore.

"But he had to be reminded!" cried Lady Middlemore.

"Oh, no: I didn't really—it was only just for a moment," growled James Whitaker.

They debated till the curtain rose whether the pleasant things one would forget with regret would outweigh the unpleasant things one would forget so gladly.

James Whitaker perceived that it would be as safe for him to move among his predecessor's friends in London as it had been to move among those in the country. Truly, now that he had hushed Mr. Brink-

man, there seemed to be no one to dispute his possession of the dukedom—so long as he did not abandon it.

He drove back with Lady Middlemore to her flat, and drank a brandy and soda and smoked a cigarette while she talked about the evening. Then she fell silent; and he was about to rise and go, when she sighed and said:

"Poor Harry!"

"Why, what's happened to him?" he said quickly.

"Nothing yet. But now that it's no use, he's certain to go and get eaten by a lion," she said sadly.

He felt that the least he could do was to comfort her with kisses.

Ten minutes later he took his leave. But before he went she had learned that he would be staying in London over the morrow, and insisted on his dining with her again and going afterward to a musical comedy. He and Millicent had been used to having souls above musical comedy; but he accepted the invitation readily enough, since he would get through the business in hand during the day, and would be at a loose end during the evening.

The next morning he caught the eleven o'clock train at Euston and went to King's Langley. It was so fine a day that he resolved to go hunting a cottage for Millicent on foot. As he walked across the fields to Chipperfield he thought of his walk from Bowdeswell to Lanchester. It seemed hardly possible that he had walked it less than a month ago; so many things had happened.

At Chipperfield and at Flaunden there was no cottage to let or be sold. But at Bovingdon he found the kind of cottage he was seeking, with six rooms, a thatched roof, white-washed walls, standing in a little garden easily to be cultivated by Millicent and old Amy. He had come to terms with the landlord in little more than half an hour, paid him a quarter's rent in advance, and arranged with him to receive Millicent's furniture when it came and have it set in the cottage for her, and to send in a woman to have the cottage clean and ready for her when she came down to it. He took the names of the village grocer and butcher, walked to Boxmoor station, and reached London at a few minutes past five. He went straight to the Ritz, had tea there, and sat in the lounge, resting pleasantly after his walk, till it was time to dress for dinner.

Lady Middlemore again welcomed him warmly, and she was wearing a gown in which he found that she looked more charming even than the night before. Also he found her no less stimulating; indeed, as he grew more at home with her and understood her better, he found her even more stimulating. Owing to the excellent dinner he had had, or to the charming companion with whom he was seeing it, he found the musical comedy sufficiently entertaining. He felt that he ought to be displeased at this, as being a sign that the ducal life was not only impairing his natural domesticatedness, but also the strenuousness of soul which had been one of his and Millicent's cultured ideals.

But he found that he could not be displeased; he was in far too good a temper with the world.

After the theater they supped very pleasantly at the Ritz. He was assured that in the more stimulating air of the ducal life his nature was expanding; life was fuller of meaning, and he was quicker to grasp it. But he gathered that he was expanding beyond his predecessor. More than once Lady Middlemore said that being struck by lightning had changed him, in a tone of pleased surprise, which assured him of that.

He escorted her to her flat, and came into it to smoke a last cigarette. He told her that he was returning to the Abbey on the morrow.

She sighed and said: "I wish you weren't."

"Well, these improvements I'm making—it's really necessary to be on the spot," he said.

"It's really necessary to get back to her," she said, mimicking his tone. Then she looked at him with very earnest eyes and said: "I know now that it is another woman—for certain. You've let it out again and again—though it isn't Lady Cubbington. But all the same she won't last forever—not with you."

"I suppose not," said James Whitaker soberly.

She left it at that.

His leave-taking was duly affectionate.

He awoke next morning in the highest spirits at the thought that he would be with Elizabeth before night. He was at Hammersmith before eleven, went to the house-agent, and found that he had already had bills printed advertising the sale of the house in Water-

gate Street. The sale would take place within a fortnight.

He went briskly to the house in Watergate Street; and when he drew near it he saw a small group of women on the other side of the road looking at it. Then he fancied that they looked at him oddly. His heart began to beat more quickly: he felt that something was wrong. Could Brinkman have got on his track by some accident? He knocked at the door sharply, impatiently.

Amy opened it, red-eyed, her cheeks stained with two inconceivably grimy tracks of tears.

"Whatever's the matter?" he cried.

The old woman's face was contorted with a grimace of misery, and she moaned: "It's the missis—she's—she's dead."

"She's what?" cried James Whitaker; and he stepped over the threshold and shut the door heavily.

"She's dead; an' she's been dead since the night before last," she said. Then her eyes began to gleam, and she said with a tremulous fierceness: "An' it's your fault. It was you as upset her—trying to drag 'er away from 'er 'ome where she'd lived all 'er life, of a sudden, wivout any warning. She didn't know whether she was standin' on 'er 'ead or 'er 'eels, pore lamb. An' 'oo would, tyken suddenlike like that? Natchrally she wouldn't notice 'ow much of that nasty stuff she was tyking."

"Chloral?" said James Whitaker.

"Verynul. An' there was no knowing where to find you; and the inquest at 'arf past twelve."

The suddenness of the catastrophe was, for the while, almost dazing; he could scarcely follow the explanation of Isabel Ward, Millicent's cousin, whom Amy had summoned to the house; and the inquest was on him before he had quite recovered from the confusion into which he had been thrown. Fortunately it was very short. There was evidence and to spare that Millicent had been an habitual taker of narcotics; and old Amy had actually been with her in her bedroom when she had poured out the overdose.

When the inquest was over he set heavily about making preparations for the funeral. Isabel Ward helped him, writing the invitations; he had but to instruct the undertaker. That done, he left her in charge of the house, telling her that business called him into town, and went back to the Ritz. He was feeling shaken and miserable; he wanted to get away from this new oppression; he wanted Elizabeth.

CHAPTER XVII

WHEN he reached the Ritz, at a quarter to three, he found that Hibbert and the car had come to take him back to the Abbey. He ate some sandwiches, paid his bill and started at a few minutes to three.

When at last they were free of London, and moving at a pleasant pace among the meadows and woods, his oppression began to lift, the wretchedness, into which the discovery and happenings of the morning had plunged him, to subside. By the time they were thirty miles out of London his spirit was almost serene; Hammersmith and the dead Millicent were little more than an ugly dream of the night before; the sight of Elizabeth would banish the memory of them from his mind for hours. They reached the Abbey at a few minutes past five.

As he drew near it James Whitaker's heart beat high at the thought that presently he would be near Elizabeth, and might even find her in the dell before dinner. It swelled too within him with an extraordinary sense of home-coming, and he realized that, since the misfortunes of his father had broken up the home of his childhood, he had never till now enjoyed the genuine home-feeling about any place in which he had lived.

The first sight of the Abbey, set among its shrubberies in the green park brightened by the shining reaches of the Wyper, thrilled him. The thought that

it was his, his home, for at any rate as many days as he chose to keep it, was very pleasant. He frowned at the thought of the pang it would cost him, even though Elizabeth went with him, to leave it. He wondered if he would ever brace himself to the sacrifice.

It was pleasant also to be welcomed by Jenkinson and two footmen, all smiling and clean in bright liveries, so strong a contrast to the lowering, dingy, malodorous Amy. He could not, indeed, understand why they were so pleased to see him, since his absence must mean more leisure and freedom for them. But it was quite clear that his return did bring an unaffected pleasure to their simple menial souls.

He found Tomkins in his bedroom, apparently no less pleased to see him. His bath was ready for him after his dusty journey, fresh underlinen and another suit of clothes were set out ready for him to wear. He felt that it was indeed homelike. The admirable tea and fresh cream and his chef's cakes deepened the feeling. He lighted a cigar and set out to find Elizabeth, feeling extraordinarily refreshed and in a fine exaltation of spirit.

His spirits were somewhat dashed to find that she was not in the dell, and they sank still lower when she did not come to it. He waited for her in the dell, or on the path through the wood to the village, till half past six. He returned to dinner in a gloomy mood, which did not lighten till he had come to the sweets, and the waxing hope that he would presently see her cheered him. Then it occurred to him that she might be ill.

"Has everything been going right in the village?" he said to Jenkinson.

"Yes, your Grace," said Jenkinson.

"I thought Hibbert said that Mr. Carton was ill," said James Whitaker.

"Oh, no, your Grace. I saw him walking through the village with Miss Carton only this afternoon, and he was looking quite all right."

James Whitaker breathed easily again; but he wondered why she had not come to the dell before dinner. She must have seen his car come through the village. Perhaps, however, she had been out, paying a visit to her friend, Cissie Wyse.

In his impatience he was in the dell at ten minutes to nine. She was not there. After a long while the church clock struck nine. At five minutes past his heart began to sink, and it went on sinking. Then suddenly at about the quarter past it leaped into his mouth, and he thrilled to a faint rustle in the path.

In a few seconds Elizabeth stood in the entrance to the glade, bright in the moonlight against the dark tree-trunks which framed her.

He sprang forward, caught her off her feet and hugged and kissed her. She was passive in his arms, returning his kisses, for perhaps ten seconds. Then she thrust herself out of them and cried indignantly:

"Why didn't you write to me?"

"I never thought of it," he said truthfully.

"You never thought of it?" she cried in amazement.

"No. I was only going to be away three days, you know."

"And didn't you think I should be wanting to hear from you?"

"No; not in that little time."

"Well, you are the most extraordinary person!" she cried, throwing out her hands in a gesture of helplessness. "There was I—expecting a letter by every post. And no letter came. And I *ought* to have had a letter—I had a right to a letter—a love-letter."

"Of course you ought," he said in a tone of lively contrition.

"I've never had a love-letter," she said plaintively.

"And I've never written one," he said.

"You've never written a love-letter!" she cried, in a fresh amazement. "Well—I give it up!"

She knew that he was speaking the truth; no one could lie in that tone.

"It was a shame to disappoint you like that," he said, putting his arm round her again.

He kissed her and drew her across the glade, sat down on the bank in the shadow, drew her down on to his knee and kissed her again. He was deeply annoyed with himself that he had disappointed her.

She nestled against him with a sigh of content, and said in a yet more plaintive tone: "Everything has gone wrong while you were away. It wasn't only that you didn't write, but people have started to talk about my meeting you; and Cissie Wyse tells me that they're saying the most horrible things."

"Hang the slanderous brutes!" he growled savagely.

"And papa has forbidden me to meet you any more. Not that I can obey him, of course; but it's perfectly

beastly for him, having people warning him and sneering, and all that."

He was very angry that they should be slandering her, and he held her tighter to him while he considered the best means of stopping it.

"This has got to be stopped," he said.

"You can't stop the people about here gossiping," said Elizabeth in a hopeless tone.

He was silent again, thinking hard. It was growing more and more unbearable that she should be hurt by these malicious brutes. He had not expected to be hurried in this way, but he was hardly sorry to be hurried.

"There's one way of stopping them," he said.

"What's that?" she said, not hopefully.

"By being married."

"It wouldn't be any use my telling people we were engaged. They simply wouldn't believe it. It isn't as though you were merely a duke, but you have such a bad character," she said.

"But if we actually were married, they'd have to believe it," he said firmly.

"I suppose they would," she said in a somewhat spiritless tone.

"But don't you want to be married?" he cried.

She seemed to hesitate; then she said: "We're very happy as we are."

"I'm not," he said quickly. "I don't see half enough of you. I want to be able to see you and talk to you all the time."

"But it's very nice meeting like this," she said. "I like it somehow—nobody knowing."

"But they do know," he said quickly.

"They don't know when and where; and being married is such a serious thing."

"But I thought you wanted to be married! That you wanted to be a duchess!" he cried in some astonishment.

"Oh, yes; I do. I do really. Only—only—I've grown rather afraid of you, you know," she said slowly.

"Well, you haven't any need to be; you know you haven't. It's I who am afraid of you—really," he said; and he crushed her to him.

"It feels like it," she said, laughing faintly.

"Oh, we must be married—we must really—say we will," he said in a pleading tone.

This new reluctance in her was a goad to him.

She hesitated; then he felt her quiver, and she said: "Very well—if we must, we must. And it's got to be that, or not seeing each other at all after a while. My father really would stop it in time. He is so obstinate; and people have really frightened him about me."

"That's all right," he said; and he kissed her.

"There's one good thing: we shall have to be married quietly—without any fuss, since your brother died so lately. I do hate all that marriage fuss. And I suppose we can't be married for at least three months."

"Oh, can't we?" he said sharply. "What's the good of being a duke if you can't marry when you want to, because a brother who always disliked you happens to die?"

"But surely three months is quite soon enough," she said.

"Oh, no; it isn't!" he cried. "With people talking like this a fortnight's quite long enough to wait."

"A fortnight! But I haven't any clothes!" she cried.

"Well, look here: we can get over that. Suppose we spend our honeymoon at Tilcombe Grange. It's a little place of mine on the coast of South Devon, right on the cliff. I don't remember it, of course; but there's a picture of it in the pink drawing-room, and it looks very nice indeed. We might stay there a fortnight, and then go to London for a fortnight. You could get lots of clothes in a fortnight in London. Then we could go on to Paris and Berlin and Vienna, and on to Italy in the autumn."

"Oh, it would be splendid!" she cried. "With you, too!"

"It certainly wouldn't be splendid without *you*," he said. "Then that's settled."

He heaved a great sigh of relief.

But when, later, they parted at the gate at the end of the wood, he walked slowly back to the Abbey somewhat troubled in spirit that he had so committed himself. But he had not been able to endure that she should be hurt by the slanders of their neighbors, and her reluctance to consent to marry him had set him

fancying that she was cooling. He perceived now that the fancy was unfounded, that her seeming coolness was the result of their three days' separation, which had, for the while, let a veil fall between them. But there must be no more of these separations: the fancy that her ardor was lessening had been too painful. They must marry; and at once. There was nothing whatever to be gained by waiting. He was glad to be acting once more on his own initiative.

How small a part had his will played in the matter after that initial impulse, when he stood dazed beside the stricken duke, to seize the chance the lightning had given him of enjoying a real holiday for three days, free from all care for the morrow. After that impulse he had been a mere puppet in the hands of the molder of events. He wondered whether that initial impulse had been inspired into him by that molder.

Presently the image of Elizabeth withdrew his mind from these speculations. He was glad that he had committed himself to marrying her. After all, it did not commit him to remaining Duke of Lanchester; they could always disappear together when the time came to do so safely. He never doubted Elizabeth for a moment; when that time came, she would go with a brave spirit.

But when, next morning, he was awakened early by the singing of the birds, and looked out over the beautiful valley gleaming with the reaches of the Wyper, golden in the rays of the low sun, he thrilled with the sense that here was indeed his home; and

he could not find it in his heart to chafe at the compulsion which kept him in it.

He sank back on to his pillow with a sigh of pleasure; and as he composed himself to sleep again, he told himself drowsily that there must be plenty of valuable social and political work he could do by way of payment for his tenure of the dukedom, even as he had earned his ducal holiday by improving the villages on the estate and ridding the Dukes of Lanchester of their racing-stable. This work he could do as no ordinary man could. It was true that he would be hampered at first by his bad reputation; but he was sure that it would not take a duke nearly so long to live down a bad reputation as it would a commoner.

He had no intention, however, of getting to this work forthwith; he would take his holiday first, traveling with Elizabeth, and rest himself thoroughly after the years of sordid struggle in the malodorous Hammersmith shop. He would come to this new valuable work refreshed and eager, with a clear head.

He rose and breakfasted cheerfully. Elizabeth was to do her best to escape to meet him in the dell at eleven; and they were to discuss his interview with her father. The thought of the interview did not trouble him at all; as Duke of Lanchester he was behaving in the most honorable fashion; he took it that Mr. Carton would be rejoiced that Elizabeth should make so excellent a marriage.

After breakfast he took his way to the office to learn whether any matter needed his personal atten-

tion, wondering how his three days' absence had affected his steward, whether he were again in the mood to revolt.

It seemed not: at his entrance Mr. Brinkman rose and washed his hands at him with his old, more than amiable smile. He explained the matters on which he desired definite instructions, with the most deferential air. He even answered James Whitaker's questions about the improvements in an amiable tone, quite free from the contemptuous bitterness with which he had at first spoken of them. James Whitaker, wearing his usual office scowl, watched him closely. His words and tones rang genuine enough; and it seemed that he was truly coming to the temper of the dog that licks the hand that beats it. James Whitaker felt quite sure that as long as he remained Duke of Lanchester, he had very little to fear from his steward.

He came away from the office therefore very well content with him, and betook himself through a window of the blue drawing-room on to the terrace to finish his cigar in the most pleasant surroundings. He had not been there long when a footman came to inform him that Mr. Carton had called to see him, and was in the pink drawing-room.

James Whitaker's first thought was that this interview might make him late at his tryst with Elizabeth; and that was annoying since Millicent's funeral was at two o'clock; and he must be there. Then he reflected that Elizabeth would probably know that her father was coming to him; and he was glad that he was going to have it over and done with. He had

far too strong a sense of his ducal position to suppose that the affair would not go the way he wished.

He had seen Mr. Carton once or twice, as he was motoring through the village, and had waved a gracious hand at him. But he had never spoken to him. He merely knew him as a dark lanky figure, with rather long black hair, moving with a long stride at a pace which made his coat tails hang well out behind him. Elizabeth had now and again spoken of him; and he had gathered that he was an impulsive, obstinate man, hard at times to manage.

As he came into the drawing-room he found him standing at the end of it in the full light of the windows. He had an impression that at the sound of his approaching footsteps he had gone to this center of the stage and struck an impressive attitude.

He came down the room with a welcoming air, held out his hand, and said: "How are you, Mr. Carton?"

Mr. Carton shook it somewhat limply, and said in a deep voice: "How do you do, your Grace?"

James Whitaker saw that he had very fine large, expressive, brown eyes, rather high up in a long face, and long, full, sensitive lips. His long nose was somewhat roughly molded and the left eyebrow was higher than the right. His narrow, pointed, receding chin spoiled the lower part of his face and gave him, indeed, the air of a man hard to manage.

He gazed at James Whitaker with his head high, even thrown a little back, and with a very earnest, stern eye. James Whitaker met his gaze without flinching and waited for him to speak.

"I have come on an unpleasant errand, your Grace," he said in deep reproving tones, and paused.

James Whitaker said nothing, but looked at him with an air of mild inquiry.

In a higher, less impressive tone Mr. Carton continued: "I have learned that your Grace has been meeting my daughter Elizabeth clandestinely, and I am very deeply annoyed about it."

"It wasn't particularly clandestinely," said James Whitaker mildly.

"If secret meetings—in the heart of a wood—are not clandestine, I should like to know what are!" cried Mr. Carton with some heat.

"Oh, but we didn't meet only in the wood. We've fished together in the park (at least, Elizabeth fished and I looked on) for hours—quite openly—and she has been here to tea—quite openly. There was nothing secret about our meetings; we just met in the most convenient way. In fact it was the only way to meet, since we don't seem to move in the same society," said James Whitaker in his most matter-of-fact tone.

"Elizabeth has been here to tea?" cried Mr. Carton. "Then she has been more indiscreet—far more indiscreet than I had supposed. It makes the matter worse—much worse. Your Grace has compromised her more seriously than I had supposed. And I will tell you frankly that deliberately to have compromised a young and inexperienced girl like Elizabeth is disgraceful—most disgraceful."

"But really I don't see what else I was to do. You couldn't expect me to marry a girl without knowing

anything about her. Of course I might have come to you and asked your permission to pay my addresses to her. But nobody does that nowadays, I think," said James Whitaker amiably.

"Marrying her? Am I to understand that you are really seriously proposing to marry her?" cried Mr. Carton in a tone of great surprise.

"Of course I am. We are definitely engaged."

"Well—of course this puts a different complexion on the matter," said Mr. Carton more gently. "Evidently you did not intend to compromise her. But marriage—marriage with you is quite out of the question, your Grace."

"Why?" said James Whitaker, surprised in his turn.

"A man of your Grace's reputation is not fit to marry a young girl," said Mr. Carton very sternly.

"Oh, hang my reputation!" said James Whitaker impatiently. "I'm not responsible for my reputation. It's just the result of a lot of idle and malicious gossip."

"I fear not—I fear that it's founded on a great deal more than that. To give only two instances, there are Lady Cubbington and Lady Middlemore. Your relations with them are not by any means merely a matter of idle and malicious gossip—not by any means," said Mr. Carton very sternly.

It seemed to James Whitaker that he was working himself into the part of an accusing angel and enjoying it.

"I can't help what people say about it; but I give you my word of honor that there are not and never

have been any serious relations between those ladies and myself," said James Whitaker with perfect truthfulness.

Mr. Carton shook his head, and said: "As a man of honor your Grace feels bound to say that. But your denial has no weight with me for that very reason. I would sooner see Elizabeth in her shroud than married to a man of your character."

He rolled out the phrase grandly, in a most impressive tone, and paused for the outburst of fury.

It did not come. James Whitaker's eyes sparkled in sudden aggravation. To his simple nature theatricality off the stage was in the highest degree abhorrent. His fingers itched to smack Mr. Carton. For the moment he felt that it was almost a duty to try to cure such a theatrical person of his staginess. But the thought that he was Elizabeth's father checked him; he would not take the smacking as Brinkman had taken it; and he had no desire to have a serious quarrel with him. Besides, Elizabeth herself would be very angry indeed. She was used to her father; possibly she did not even perceive his theatricality; she only knew that he was hard to manage.

He gulped down his irritation and said in a pacific tone: "Well, if you feel like that, you feel like that, and there is no more to be said about it. But, of course, it's for Elizabeth to settle."

"Nothing of the kind, your Grace! What does a child like that understand about human depravity?" cried Mr. Carton. "Why, she probably knows nothing at all about you and these—these ladies."

"She knows all there is to know. I'm quite sure of that," said James Whitaker calmly. "I've told you there isn't anything in it; she's talked to me about those ladies, and I think she's satisfied about it."

"It was no subject for her to discuss; but of course you would spare her the truth. Indeed, if she knew it, she would shrink from you with a pure woman's loathing," said Mr. Carton, again rolling out the phrase with a splendid air.

James Whitaker ground his teeth softly; then he said: "Well, there's not much use going on discussing the matter. Elizabeth has got to settle it."

"Indeed she has not. For the next three months, at any rate, she can not marry without my consent; and always—always she will be guided by me in the serious and important matter of the choice of a husband."

"Well, well: we'll let it go at that," said James Whitaker in an indulgent tone. "I'm only pointing out that it's a waste of time for *us* to discuss it."

Mr. Carton looked at him with a somewhat balked air. The interview had not been so satisfying as he had expected. He had come prepared with some fine denunciations of the duke's conduct in compromising Elizabeth by clandestine meetings and had found them unneeded since the duke proposed to marry her. He had expected the duke to fly into a fine fury when he found himself balked and rebuked by an unbending scathing moralist. James Whitaker's amiable indulgence had prevented him making nearly

as much, emotionally, as might have been made of the interview; and he was annoyed with him.

"Well, since you Grace quite understands my position in the matter, and, furthermore, that there is no chance whatever of my being stirred from it, there is no point in our continuing the interview," he said stiffly, moving toward the door.

"Quite so—quite so," said James Whitaker amiably; and he opened it.

He walked across the hall with him to the front door, shook his stiff hand with friendly warmth, and bade him good-by. Mr. Carton walked down the steps slowly and stiffly, his head well in the air. He still felt himself, and even more strongly now that he was free of James Whitaker's unperturbed amiability, the scathing moralist.

James Whitaker was indeed unperturbed: he felt that Elizabeth and himself were far too deeply in love to be greatly affected by anything any third person, even her father, might say or do. But as he took his way to the dell his natural stubbornness began to stir at the opposition, which, considering his rank, he felt to be most unreasonable. At the moment he felt very strongly that a duke had almost a natural right to another, less exacting, moral standard than common men.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE interview with Mr. Carton had made him a few minutes late; and he found Elizabeth awaiting him in the dell. In her pleasure at his return to her from London she was radiant; she had forgotten his neglect to write to her.

He sat down beside her and greeted her with the warmth her beauty demanded. Then he said:

"I've just had an interview with your father."

"Have you? What did he say?" she said quickly and a little anxiously.

"Well, he wasn't very complimentary to me. He insisted that I was a scoundrel; and there was no persuading him that I wasn't."

"No. When papa does get an idea into his head, there's no getting it out of it," said Elizabeth in the tone of one who has suffered.

"That's what struck me," he said. "But the nuisance is that he refuses to let you marry me. He won't hear of it."

"Bother!" said Elizabeth, frowning.

"Of course he can only stop you marrying for the next three months. You'll be of age then. But it's such a long time. I can't wait three months," he said in a very plaintive tone.

Elizabeth nestled closer to him compassionately; then she said: "But it isn't only that three months is a long time; but at the end of three months he'll be quite as keen, or even keener, on my not marrying you; and we shall be no better off."

"Do you mean to say you wouldn't marry me unless your father consented?" he cried.

"No: I don't say that. But it would be nicer to have his consent," she said. Then she continued slowly and thoughtfully: "Besides, you don't know papa. He's really awfully clever at getting his own way; and if he's made up his mind to stop our being married and has three months to work at it, he very likely will stop it."

"But how could he?" cried James Whitaker.

"Oh, he might find some way of making us quarrel. He might set me against you—somehow. You don't know papa. He is so clever," she said in a despondent tone.

"Do you mean to say he'd make you unhappy—just to get his own way?" said James Whitaker with a touch of incredulity in his tone.

"Of course not. He'd make me unhappy just to prevent you making me unhappy when I was married to you."

"Oh, I see," said James Whitaker thoughtfully.

And then, quite suddenly, he saw how to turn this ingenuity of his father-in-law to his own advantage.

"Look here: we can't run a risk like this," he said quickly and earnestly. "I can't have you made unhappy; and I don't want to be made unhappy myself

—about you of all things. And the important thing is that whatever your father thinks about me, you trust me. Don't you?"

"Yes, I do," said Elizabeth with decision.

"Well, then, let us be married right away. I know that you can get a special marriage license which enables you to be married anywhere and at once. I'll go up to London this afternoon and get one; and tomorrow we'll just elope."

"Elope? I thought that eloping was a thing of the past," she said.

"Oh, no: not with motor-cars handy," he said. "And when once your father is faced with the fact that we're actually married, he'll probably calm down."

"Yes; you're right about that: he does," she said quickly; then she added in a slower, hesitating voice: "It would be rather fun—eloping."

The desire to make her safely his, immediately, had already gripped James Whitaker; and he said:

"It would be a great deal better than fun. It would be a splendid thing to feel that we belonged absolutely to each other and couldn't be separated; and we really ought to act quickly before your father gets to work. And, besides all that, I do so want to have you always with me."

His tone was urgent, compelling; and there was a new masterfulness in his eyes. She found it hard to meet them.

"Yes," she said, still hesitating. "But I haven't any clothes."

"You can get them afterward—in Paris if you like.

You've plenty to be married very quietly in. I tell you what: we could be married at Tilcombe Rectory, and go on to the Grange. I'll get the special license this afternoon; we'll motor down there and be married to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" she cried.

"Yes. If we're going to do it quickly, let's do it really quickly," he said with yet more earnest vehemence. "I do so want to feel that you're safely mine. Don't you want to feel that you're safe too?"

"Yes: I suppose I do," she said in a low voice.

"Then that settles it!" he cried triumphantly; and he kissed her again and again.

When his transports had somewhat abated, they discussed the method of her flight with him. She must bring with her some clothes—clothes for a week at any rate; and they must start some hours before Mr. Carton learned of the elopement. It seemed to him that Cissie Wyse was the best person to help them in this; and Elizabeth agreed with him. She could take some of her clothes to Longmeadow Farm that morning, some more in the afternoon, some more in the evening and some more next morning. She could indeed convey thither all the clothes she would need; and Cissie would lend her a portmanteau. At the end of half an hour's discussion they had their way clearly mapped out; they would leave the final arrangements till the evening, for if he had to get to London and back by dinner-time, the sooner he started the better. He bade her good-by and hurried back to the Abbey.

He ordered the car and wrote a telegram to Messrs. Blenkinsop and Tudor, bidding them meet the train at Paddington and take all steps to enable him to obtain without delay a special marriage license. He pocketed the telegram, for he thought that if he despatched it from Little Lanchester, Mr. Carton might easily hear its contents within the hour. Then he took five hundred dollars from the secret drawer of the bureau, and going down to the hall, told Jenkinson that he was motoring down to Tilcombe on the morrow, and bade him make all the arrangements to take down the servants he usually took to the Grange, so that they should be there ready to receive him on his arrival late in the afternoon.

Hibbert drove him to Lanchester; and he had just time to despatch his telegram and catch the London express. On the platform at Paddington he was accosted by Mr. Tudor himself, who told him that he had sent on the managing clerk of the firm to inform the officials that the Duke of Lanchester required a special marriage license. They would be ready; and he would obtain it as quickly as possible. James Whitaker, using his hoarse and husky voice, thanked him; and they bustled into a taxicab.

On the way, James Whitaker learned that both the contracting parties must be of age, or he would not obtain the license. Accordingly when they came to the office, he added four months to the age of Elizabeth. He obtained the license forthwith, and paid for it out of the money he had found in the bureau, since he considered it to be distinctly a family affair.

When he came out of the office, he thanked Mr. Tudor warmly for having helped him to despatch the business so quickly; and bade him good-by.

As he was getting into a taxicab, the lawyer said: "I hope your Grace hasn't forgotten the wedding-ring."

That was what James Whitaker had forgotten; but a certain compunction held him from buying it on his way to Millicent's funeral. In the expansion of his nature induced by the ducal life, he had no compunction whatever about marrying Elizabeth the day after that funeral, for it was so long since Millicent had counted for anything in his life. She was merely a part of the Hammersmith nightmare; and even in that she counted for little more than old Amy. None the less, he balked at buying the wedding-ring before her funeral.

He took the tube to Hammersmith Broadway, and reached the house in Watergate Street at a quarter to two, to find Millicent's relations eating ham sandwiches and drinking sherry in the parlor behind the shop. He went up-stairs, changed into his ill-fitting Sunday frock coat and a pair of shiny black trousers he had bought second-hand for William Ward's funeral, and joined them. They were all very gloomy and decorous; and the parlor was painfully stuffy. He was once more plunged into the nightmare; and the next two hours passed in a dismal wretchedness.

He did not come straight back to the house, but made the changes in his business arrangements neces-

sitated by Millicent's death, appointing Isabel Ward his attorney to receive all moneys realized by the sale of the house and business, provide for old Amy out of it, and send the remainder to him in America when he should write for it. Then he went back, changed into his tweed suit, and came out of the house in a sudden tingling exhilaration: he was done with the old cramped, dirty life for good and all.

He had now to buy the wedding-ring; and he was glad that he had brought five hundred dollars with him. He had to buy not only a wedding-ring for Elizabeth, but also an engagement ring.

After paying for the special license he had more than three hundred dollars left; and at a jeweler's in Piccadilly he bought a sapphire and diamond ring for three hundred dollars, which seemed to him of as good a design as he could expect in a piece of modern jewelry. He had not measured Elizabeth's finger; but he knew that his signet ring fitted her third finger, for one afternoon she had idly slipped it on to it; and now it served as a measure. Then he bought the wedding-ring. That done he had tea at a Bond Street tea-shop and caught the five-fifteen express at Paddington. Hibbert met him at Lanchester with the car; and he was back at the Abbey before seven.

Elizabeth came to the dell that evening with an uncertain mind. Cissie Wyse, a somewhat timid creature, had been frightened by her intention of eloping with the duke, and had somewhat shaken her resolution. None the less Elizabeth had conveyed to Longmeadow Farm the clothes she would need, and they

were already packed in the portmanteau Cissie had lent her.

She might, however, have changed her mind about eloping on the morrow, had not James Whitaker's plain devotion to her hardened her resolution, and driven away her doubts. When he slipped the ring on to her finger, her last scruple vanished; she was assured that she was doing the right thing.

They were late parting, or rather tearing themselves away from each other, that night, and James Whitaker was some time getting to sleep after that. He was harassed by a nervous dread lest even now something might go wrong and rob him of Elizabeth. It was quite clear to him now that it was Elizabeth he wanted, not the home, or the pleasant life, or the dukedom, but just Elizabeth. Had it not been for her, he would before this have started for America to attempt a new free life. He told himself that with her in the place of Millicent, he could even have returned to the Hammersmith shop and have been happy.

However, he slept at last, and when he awoke to find the bright sunlight streaming through his windows, his fear had vanished.

As they had arranged, he was in the car at the end of the garden of Longmeadow Farm at twelve o'clock, and five minutes later Elizabeth and Cissie Wyse came out of the gate, carrying between them the portmanteau. Elizabeth was rather pale, Cissie flushed with excitement. James Whitaker sprang from the car, took the portmanteau from them and put it beside the

astonished Hibbert. Then he shook hands with the two girls, congratulating them in a cheerful tone on their punctuality, and thanked Cissie Wyse for having helped them. The two girls kissed, and bade each other good-by, Cissie now tearful, and Elizabeth stepped into the car. He shook hands with Cissie and said: "It's a pity that you can't come with us and be bridesmaid," bade Hibbert get them to Marlborough in time for lunch, and sprang into the car.

It started, and when it came round a bend in the road, Elizabeth turned and clung to him for a breath, and their lips met in a long kiss. Then they sank back; she put on a pair of disguising goggles, and they sat, very decorous, but holding hands under the rug.

The plunge taken, Elizabeth was presently herself, keenly alert, enjoying the swift passage of the car and the beautiful country through which it was running, talking to him in tones of a new tenderness. Thrilling with tenderness and triumph, he watched her glowing face, and for a long while could hardly, in the turmoil of his emotion, talk to her coherently.

They reached Marlborough at half past one, and the stopping of the car, the getting out of it and going into the hotel, brought them down once more to the plane of ordinary life. James Whitaker observed that Hibbert was looking gloomy, and guessed his suspicions. Therefore, instead of despatching himself the telegram he had written to Mr. Appleton, the rector of Tilcombe, requesting him to be ready to marry them quietly between six and seven that evening, he gave it to Hibbert to despatch. When, after

a delightful lunch, they started again, the clouds had vanished from Hibbert's face.

They had tea at a little inn at Chard, and about an hour later they had their first glimpse of the sea. At the sight of it Elizabeth's clasp tightened on his hand.

"Oh, I do love the sea," she said. "I'm so glad we've come to the sea."

"So am I. But any place with you would satisfy me," he said.

They were not long reaching Tilcombe, and at the rectory they found the rector, his wife and his daughters awaiting them in flushed excitement. The rector suggested that they could, with perfect privacy, be married in the church, and Elizabeth received the suggestion with warm approval. Accordingly, they were married in the church, the rector's excited daughters supporting Elizabeth, who was far cooler than they, Hibbert supporting James Whitaker.

Elizabeth came out of the church pale; but the paleness passed as Hibbert drove them through the village and up the steep road to the Grange, which stood on the cliff on the other side of it. At the sight of Elizabeth, Jenkinson lost for a moment his admirable calm; but he had recovered it before the footman had opened the door of the car.

When they came up the steps into the hall, James Whitaker said: "Hang it, I've forgotten this place too! I was hoping I should remember it. Well, you'll have to show me my way about, Jenkinson."

"That's quite nice," said Elizabeth joyfully. "We shall be able to learn it together."

"And find some one who can act as maid to her Grace for the time being," said James Whitaker.

"Yes, your Grace. There's Mrs. Whittick, your Grace—the head gardener's wife. She's had experience," said Jenkinson.

It was already a quarter past seven; there was no time to explore the Grange before dinner and Mrs. Whittick was summoned forthwith to wait on Elizabeth.

At dinner they were at first somewhat constrained. In the circumstances they found the presence of Jenkinson and two footmen oppressive; they endured it as one of the penalties of their rank. But presently the constraint wore off; they forgot their attendants and were at their ease. The thoughtful Jenkinson had set a small table for them in the middle window of the dining-room, from which they looked down on the sea, golden in the setting sun.

After dinner they took their coffee on a little terrace at the end of the left wing, a terrace on the edge of the cliff, hidden from the windows of the house by a screen of tall shrubs. Talking softly, with many silences, they saw the sun sink into the sea, the twilight fade and the stars come slowly out.

James Whitaker's mind was at ease: he did not believe that any harm could come to Elizabeth from his holding the dukedom till such a time as the danger from Mr. Brinkman should have passed, even though it might be years before he could safely disappear. His conscience was clear: apart from his sudden whim,

when he was unhinged by a lightning-stroke, to be a duke for three days, he had not been a free agent; he had been forced to stay duke; and he believed that he could, by good work, pay for the position as long as he held it.

These were comforting thoughts, but really these were not important things. The great and wonderful thing was that he had Elizabeth. He drew her yet closer to him; and they sat silent in a thrilling content.

It was dark now, save for the light of the stars and a very faint brightness on the western edge of the sea. Then a distant clock, chiming a half-hour, roused them. He drew her to her feet and kissed her; and they walked through the dim scented garden to the house. When they came on to the central lawn before it, they found the whole front in darkness, except the four windows of their rooms on the first floor.

"Oh, it does look nice and lonely," said Elizabeth.

"Yes, that's quite as it should be," he said. "You're not afraid to be alone with me?"

"Certainly not. I'm a duchess now," said Elizabeth.

The Duke of Lanchester laughed gently.

THE END

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